


**BOSTON  
PUBLIC  
LIBRARY**





Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2022 with funding from  
Kahle/Austin Foundation



JESUS  
*A MYTH*





# JESUS

· A MYTH ·

By GEORG BRANDES

*Translated from the Danish by*

EDWIN BJÖRKMAN



ALBERT & CHARLES BONI

NEW YORK    ~    ~    MCMXXVI

Copyright, 1926, by Albert & Charles Boni, Inc.

RL  
/

BT 303

. B73

Copy 2

*Manufactured in the U. S. A.*



*I will be harsh as truth  
and as uncompromising as justice.  
I am in earnest.  
I will not equivocate,  
I will not excuse,  
I will not retreat a single inch,  
and I will be heard.*

WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON



## INTRODUCTION



## INTRODUCTION

For more than six hundred years the average man in Switzerland and elsewhere has never doubted that William Tell was a farmer from Bürglen in the canton of Uri, and a son-in-law of Walter Fürst, likewise from Uri. When, on the 18th of November, 1307, he refused to uncover his head to the hat which the Austrian bailiff, Hermann Gessler, had put on a pole in Altdorf as a sign of Austrian sovereignty, Tell, as a famous archer, was ordered by the bailiff to shoot an apple from the head of his little son. If he failed, the boy must die with him.

Tell hit the apple. But he admitted that another arrow, which he had prepared in case of missing with the first one, was meant for Gessler. Whereupon the bailiff caused Tell to be seized and brought to his castle. A storm on the Lake of Lucerne endangered the boat, and Tell was freed from his chains in



## JESUS : A MYTH

---

order to take the helm. By a tremendous leap he succeeded in reaching the shore, while the boat was pushed back into the storm. Later he killed the bailiff with an arrow as the latter was passing on horseback through the "hollow way" at Küssnacht. In 1315 he fought for Swiss freedom in the great battle at Morgarten, and in 1354 he died while trying to save a child from drowning in the Schächenbach.

There are in Switzerland not less than three Tell chapels. Near the ancient village of Bürglen a small chapel decorated with scenes out of Tell's life commemorates the spot where the house used to stand in which he lived. Right back of it rises the ivy-wreathed ruin of a tower, where in the olden days, when Lower Uri still belonged to the convent of Sts. Felix and Regula at Zürich, the local representative of the "protector" of the abbey was said to have had his residence. But in that vicinity has long been asserted that the tower formed part of a castle belonging to a Herr von Attinghausen, a nobleman of whom

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

it is also reported that he was the father-in-law of Tell. Consequently he is called Walter, Fürst (prince) von Attinghausen. In the course of time it became also a common report that Tell himself had been of noble birth, and Marshal Fidel von Zurlauben, whom the historian, Johannes von Müller, called the living archive of Switzerland, included a reproduction of William Tell's coat of arms in his lists of the nobility of Uri.

This chapel at Bürglen was begun in 1582 and dedicated in May, 1584.

The Tell Rock (*Tell Platte*) and the leap to safety are mentioned for the first time in a Swiss chronicle compiled between 1467 and 1480. The likelihood is that the chapel at this spot was not built before the middle of the sixteenth century. From 1561 we hear of pilgrimages to the Tell Rock, and in 1582 the canton of Uri directed them to be held annually under the guidance of the authorities in full regalia.

The third Tell chapel stands at Küssnacht, near the "hollow way" in which the bailiff is

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

supposed to have met his death. In this connection several puzzling circumstances are to be noted. The town and castle of Küssnacht were not added to the canton of Schwiz until the beginning of the fifteenth century. What, then, could the Schwiz bailiff Gessler have to do at that spot? The incongruity becomes still more marked when it is recalled that the so-called Gessler Castle lies at the foot of the Rigi, close to the town of Küssnacht. Thus the bailiff, who landed at Küssnacht on his way from Uri, had only a few hundred steps to go in order to reach his fortress and find rest after his terrifying trip across the lake. To get near the spot where the chapel stands, he had to pass by his castle and, in the midst of a stormy night, ride all the way to Immensee in order to reach the hollow way and allow himself to be shot from the location indicated by the chapel.

As well known nowadays, the explanation is quite simple: William Tell never existed. There never was any bailiff by the name of Gessler. The whole story about the founda-

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

tion of the Swiss Confederation by the leaguers at Rütli is a legend.

Less known is the trouble it has taken to get the truth of the matter acknowledged. In 1752 the Bernese pastor, Uriel Freudenberger, urged the clergy of Uri to confute all who doubted the existence of Tell by producing some of the many evidential documents said to exist. The response came in 1759 and took the form of a series of forgeries. Next year Freudenberger issued his pamphlet, "*Guillaume Tell, fable danoise*," which was confiscated and publicly burned. It is a mistake when MacLeod Yearsley in his "The Folk Lore of Fairy Tale" (London, 1924), says that Freudenberger himself was burned alive. But the fact remains that he was treated with anything but kindness. Whoever proclaims a truth upsetting beliefs dear to the people must be prepared for some persecution and much abuse. One has only to recall the campaign started in Germany seventy-five years later against David Friedrich Strauss on similar grounds.

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

The solution of the William Tell riddle, however, was not quite so simple as Freudenberger imagined. It seems certain that the popular legend about Palnatoke, as related by Saxo Grammaticus (about 1180), must have reached Switzerland in its literary form and furnished the foundation for the legend of Tell.<sup>1</sup> Grimm, in his "*Deutsche Mythologie*," maintained that the death of King Harald Bluetooth at the hands of Toke was historical, while the shot at the apple was wholly mythological. On the other hand, the learned Konrad Maurer, who was far better informed on ancient northern conditions, denied Palnatoke any historical existence. In

<sup>1</sup> It is now fairly well established that the archer Toke or Tokko (i.e., fool) mentioned by Saxo as having been forced to shoot an apple from his son's head is not identical with the legendary viking chieftain Palnatoke, who founded the viking colony at Jomsburg, near Vineta or Wollin on the German coast, and who is far more likely to have been a historical personality. The story, which occurs repeatedly in the northern saga literature under different forms, as well as in Holstein and England at a later date, can hardly have reached Switzerland "in a literary form" early enough to form the Tell legend, as the Saxo manuscript was not printed until 1514. The legend seems to be a common Nordic property, and more probable it is that it reached Switzerland by means of some Scandinavian immigration, of which several cases are traditionally preserved. *Transl.*



## JESUS : A MYTH

---

the original legend he is not even a Dane, but a Finnish chieftain. And there is a lot of mythology in the fatal shot. The fundamental significance of the word Tell is that of a fool acting blindly (as did Hodur when he killed Baldur). Furthermore, the legend is universal. The Persian poet Farid ud-din 'Attar, born in 1119, mentioned in his "*Mantik-uttair*," or "Speeches of Birds" (1175), a king who had a favorite slave. On the head of this he put apples against which he aimed arrows, cleaving them infallibly, until the slave sickened with fright.

In Tell's leap from the boat there is also a lot of mythology. Through the ages there has been a standing tradition, that the god struggling with demons, or the hero whose life is threatened, save themselves from their pursuers by a marvellous leap. Glaucus, surnamed Pontius, for instance, was a fisherman who leapt into the sea and became worshipped as a god in the Boeotian city of Anthedon. In ancient days there was a spot by the sea known as "the leap of Glaucus."

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

When the Anglo-Saxon poet Cynewulf related the life of Jesus in 1006, he arranged the Ascension in such manner that Jesus had to perform six miraculous leaps, of which only the last sufficed to bring him into Heaven.

As mentally deficient, Tell was early given three guardians by the legend: Werner von Stauffacher, Walter Fürst, and Arnold von Melchthal. These combine at Rütli for the establishment of the Swiss Confederation. Tell is excluded from their meetings.

Everything else is equally fabulous and unreal.

It constitutes a spot on the fame of the great Swiss historian Johannes von Müller that, out of regard for his own popularity, he spoke only in vague and ambiguous terms about Tell and Gessler, although he was personally convinced that the legend had no historic foundation whatsoever.

Through Schiller's beautiful tragedy, "Wilhelm Tell," written under the inspiration of Goethe, the significance of Tell as a Swiss

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

national hero and a personification of the love of liberty became established for all time to come. To such an extent has Tell become identified with the Swiss state that for a long time his image appeared on the postage stamps of Switzerland.

He never existed. But that makes no difference. He is and will remain an active ideal, and as a model he still rules the minds of men.

The same is true of another figure, also belonging to the world of legend, but one that has exercised a far greater influence on the spiritual life of Europe and America.



## § 1

A MOST confusing circumstance connected with the editing of the group of minor writings which, in accordance with Mark 14:24, have been given the strange collective title of the New Testament, is that they are not arranged chronologically, the oldest first, and then the rest in the order of their production. Of course, this order is not established with absolute certainty. But this much is certain, that it does not at all agree with the order in which the writings in question appear. What makes the problem involved particularly difficult is that most of those writings have suffered numerous emendations, eliminations and interpolations, so that frequently different parts of the same text are of different date.

Half a century ago, the ten learned, able and progressive German theologians who edited the so-called Protestant Bible of 1872,



## JESUS : A MYTH

---

were unanimous in declaring that the Apocalypse, the Revelation of St. John, which appears last in the New Testament, was in reality produced ahead of all the rest.

Nowadays advanced students are inclined to believe that the Revelation of St. John originally was not a Christian work at all, but Jewish, and that it has got its present form only through a much later re-writing. In spite of this change, nothing indicates that the supernatural figure mentioned in the Revelation has anything at all in common with the young carpenter (or mason) and lay preacher from Galilee who forms the subject of the Gospel according to St. Mark. The Messiah appears in the skies and has a voice like "the great trumpet" of which Isaiah speaks (27:13). He cries:

"I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last" . . . terms used by Jahve about himself in the Old Testament (Isaiah 48:12).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The text of the Authorized Version has been used for all quotations from the Old and New Testaments except when otherwise indicated. The standard Bibles of this country and England, based on that version, present certain incongruities in

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

He stands in the midst of seven candlesticks, like unto the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to his feet, and with a golden girdle bound around his breast. His head and his hair are white like wool or snow. His eyes are like flames of fire. His feet are like fine brass, drawn burning out of the furnace. His voice is like the sound of many waters. He has in his right hand seven stars, and out of his mouth goes a sharp two-edged sword. His countenance is like the sun when it shineth in its strength.

The author has had the Book of Daniel before him and has partly copied, partly paraphrased the passage (7:9) where it is written: "His garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool; his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire."

Here we meet at first with a visionary image out of the Book of Daniel which long

the spelling of names, such as Isaiah and Esaias, Elijah and Elias, Messiah and Messias. The names have been printed here as they appear in the Bible. *Transl.*

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

afterwards becomes modified into the picture of a vagrant, preaching youth displayed by various portions of the Gospels.

These anonymous books of edification, which have exercised such a tremendous influence on the European and American branches of humanity, but which possess such small historic value, are, in the New Testament, placed far ahead of the Pauline epistles, although the few parts of these that are genuine reveal to us the mode of feeling of a much earlier period. This situation has caused irreparable damage, spreading a multiplicity of unconquerable prejudices and making it wellnigh impossible even for the better informed elements of our race to accept a more correct understanding of historic and spiritual facts in place of the one conventionally entertained.

### § 2

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the tendency disapprovingly named

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

free-thinking was aimed chiefly at the so-called miracles. Gradually the idea had taken shape that what we call natural laws are authentic manifestations of the divine spirit. Individual persons realized how irrational and improbable it was that a deity or a specially inspired human being should reveal his superior nature by violations of laws that were also divine. The Rationalists regarded the miracles as naïve embellishments of historic events, or as deliberate interpolations meant to foster a belief in supernatural power. The historic foundations were not at all questioned. If only the miracles could be disposed of, the genuine element in religion would remain, the Free-thinkers imagined . . . what they called the "religion of reason."

In England as in France and Germany; to Lord Herbert of Cherbury, John Toland, and Anthony Collins; to Fontenelle, Jean Meslier, and Voltaire; to Reimarus, Moses Mendelssohn, and Lessing (who was greater than

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

all of them), it is the miracles . . . these events that are presented as historic although contrary to nature . . . that form the fortress to be stormed, or the battlefield on and for which the fight must rage.

As late as 1863, the sole object of Renan in his "*Vie de Jesus*" was to extract from a heap of mythical slag that tiny Christ figure of ivory which he created by a blending of criticism, racial psychology, and sentimentally poetic genius, using himself as model for the gentleness and transcendent irony of that figure, while as model for its stern and threatening attitude toward clerical hypocrisy he used Lamennais as he appeared after his break with Rome.

To-day no importance attaches to a problem that preoccupied religiously interested people fifty years ago. The question whether miracles are possible or probable has disappeared of itself. It is no longer raised, because no one is concerned about it except those engaged in exposing fakirs, mediums, and



## JESUS : A MYTH

---

quacks claiming to use methods akin to old-fashioned magic.

The problem now has assumed quite a different aspect and magnitude.

Every student of ancient religious rites knows full well that the ideal image of one unjustly tortured and martyred; of one tormented for the very reason that he is good and righteous; of one chosen as a victim by human malice and bearing his sufferings for the sake of the rest . . . that this image had been drawn with devoted passion long before the time when the historical Jesus is supposed to have come into this world. The figure of the suffering Messiah was the personification of the Jewish people as oppressed and maltreated by their neighbors, and yet as stronger than these because they were the mouthpieces of truth and justice. This ideal of majesty, of undeserved suffering, of superior humanity, is already discernible in the Second Isaiah. In another shape, the same ideal revealed itself to Plato in his contemplation of the spir-

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

itual superiority of Socrates, whose reward also was an ignominious death.

In other words, the Christ figure as an ideal of spiritual superiority, of love for humanity, of charity and purity, was many centuries older than the noble-minded Galilean man of the people who, nineteen hundred years ago, was said to have given historic embodiment to this prototype. The same figure will survive him for many centuries to come, even if he, as now seems likely, should never have existed.

In the last analysis, therefore, it is of no importance how his life on earth is said to have shaped itself. We no longer ask whether Jesus was born by a miracle, whether he wrought miraculous cures, or whether he drove out evil spirits by miraculous means . . . we no longer know what a devil is any more than we know what is meant by a virgin birth or any other miraculous event. Those are spectral visions never beheld by us and never present in our minds.

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

### § 3

What fascinates us now is not the question of miracles, or of no miracles, but the manner in which myths and legends take shape.

A new reader of the Bible would, for instance, be startled by the fact that the crucifixion of Jesus, if it ever took place, could be laid at the door of the Jews then living. For it is a proved fact, after all, that the Jews inhabiting the Palestine of those days had no legal jurisdiction whatsoever.<sup>1</sup> Consequently they were quite unable to pronounce sentence on anybody. In addition, however, it is very hard to understand what interest they could have in pressing the Roman procurator to take the life of Jesus. And it seems unlikely that he would yield to such pressure.

It is no more imaginable that the British vice-regent of India should sentence a Hindu to death for expressing heterodox opinions about the teachings of Buddha, than it is that a Roman procurator should interfere on ac-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. note on page 58. *Transl.*

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

count of an accusation like the one made against Jesus, according to Mark 14:58 . . . and that he should do so in the face of admittedly conflicting evidence. He is reported to have said:

"I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands."

The Gospel according to St. John takes this statement in a symbolic sense. Taken literally as it is in Mark, it does not seem to imply anything socially dangerous.

Let us suppose that a man of our own day should be accused of having said: "I will destroy Christiansborg,<sup>1</sup> but within three days I will build another palace of much greater spiritual beauty."

The court would then first make sure that he had really said such a thing. Then it would inquire whether the defendant actually had taken any steps toward the material de-

<sup>1</sup> One of the principal royal palaces at Copenhagen, now largely occupied by the Rigsdag, the Supreme Court, and various government departments.

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

struction of the palace. This not being the case, the matter would undoubtedly be dropped. Any inquiry whether steps had been taken toward the building of a heavenly Christiansborg may be regarded as quite out of the question.

In the same way, the Roman official would undoubtedly first of all have ascertained whether the defendant had made any attempt to tear down the Temple. If this were denied, he must have understood that the utterance credited to Jesus, if ever made as reported, must be taken in a figurative or poetic sense, and thereupon he would have dropped the case as none of his concern.

Of this we may be pretty sure, for in the Acts 18:12, where, quite exceptionally, an historical personality appears, thus lending credibility to the story, we read of the answer given by Junius Annaeus Gallio, the brother of Seneca, when he was procurator of Achaia (A. D. 51-52) and the Jews of Corinth accused Paul of "persuading men to worship God contrary to the law." He said:

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

"If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: but if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters."

All through the Old Testament appear statements that might be interpreted as referring to a Messiah like the one supposed to have arrived. In Deuteronomy 18:15 these words are put into the mouth of Moses himself: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken." In John 6:14, a reference to these words follows immediately after the story about the feeding of 5,000 men with five small loaves. Then the people said: "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world." And in Acts 3:22, Peter draws support from the same statement by Moses.

Several passages occur in the Prophet Zechariah which evidently have suggested acts ascribed to Jesus. In Zechariah 9:9 we read as follows: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."

And again we read in Zechariah 14:21: "And in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts." This may be regarded as an excuse for ascribing to Jesus his otherwise quite unreasonable attack on those who sold doves for sacrifice in the outer court of the Temple, or who exchanged the coins that were to be paid in tithes. Imagine a modern reformer trying to drive away the old women in front of Notre Dame who are selling wax candles to be lighted for the peace of the dead!

### § 4

When a man's suspicions have been aroused by comparisons of this kind, it soon becomes evident to him that the story of the Passion cannot possibly have occurred as it is told in the Gospels.



## JESUS : A MYTH

---

Let us turn to Psalm 22 in the Old Testament. It begins with these words. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But this is the cry of Jesus dying on the cross. Does it not seem strange that he should have died with a quotation on his lips?

And who heard it? In the oldest Gospel, none of his own people are present. All the apostles, or disciples as they are called there, had fled (Mark 14: 50), and Peter had even denied him. According to the later and far less reliable evidence of Matthew, a number of women looked on from a great distance (*apo makrothen*). These seem to have been introduced chiefly because the narrator thought it unseemly that Jesus should have died without the presence of a single person dear to him. But they are expressly placed so far off that they could not possibly hear the last words of the dying man.

In the Psalm already quoted, which must be centuries older than the story of the Passion, we read furthermore (22:7): "All

they that see me laugh me to scorn : they shoot out the lip, they shake the head."

Practically the same words are used about the Crucified in Matthew 27: 39. Again we read in Psalm 22, verse 16: "The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet." From this passage derives not only the one in John 20: 25, where Thomas insists on seeing the print of the nails in the hands of Jesus, but also the manner in which all Christian art represents the Crucified . . . with pierced hands and feet, and without the small seat (*sedile*), on which the doomed man was placed, his feet as a rule tied, and not nailed, to the cross. The torture involved was painful enough anyhow. In the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, which has been used above, Psalm 22: 16 contains the misunderstood passage: "They tore at my hands and feet"; which later became: "They pierced my hands and feet." It should read: "They cling like a lion to my hands and feet." The former ver-

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

sion was supposed to contain a foreshadowing of the crucifixion.

Further on in Psalm 22, verse 18, we read : "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture." Here we have the unmistakable source of Matthew 27:35, where it is told how those who had crucified Jesus divided his garments by casting lots.

Thus the study of a single Psalm suffices to put the reader on the right track by showing him how the details of the Passion story were pieced together from statements in the Old Testament, always with the added explanation that it happened thus in order that the old prophecy should be fulfilled . . . a line of reasoning that has lost its meaning to the present generation. We can see nothing in this but the gradual piecing together of a mosaic picture out of old quotations known by heart.

In Psalm 41:9 reference is made to a betrayal of the speaker by some one in whom he trusted, and who had even eaten of his bread. It is also said that the one who jeered at him

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

was not an enemy, that the one who exalted himself at his cost was not a jealous rival, but a man with whom he associated familiarly, and in whom he saw a friend. In Acts 1:16 this passage is interpreted as a clear prophecy concerning the act of Judas, so that we may suspect the entire figure of Judas to be derived from the passage in question.

In Psalm 69:21 we read: "They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." Once more we perceive how one detail after another of the Passion story was taken directly from the Old Testament.

We get a similar impression from Isaiah 49:6: "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting."

In the Wisdom of Solomon, 2:12 *et seq.*, we find these passages: "Let us lie in wait for the righteous; because he is not for our turn, and he is clean contrary to our doings: he upbraideth us with our offending the law . . . He professeth to have the knowledge of

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

God: and he calleth himself the child of the Lord . . . We are esteemed of him as counterfeits: he abstaineth from our ways as from filthiness . . . and maketh his boast that God is his father. Let us see if his words be true: And let us prove what shall happen in the end of him. For if the just man be the son of God, He will help him, and deliver him from the hands of his enemies. Let us examine him with despitefulness and torture, that we may know his meekness, and prove his patience. Let us condemn him with a shameful death."

And in Isaiah 11:1 *et seq.* occur these far-famed expressions: "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord . . . With righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked . . . The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den."

Here is heralded a paradisaical existence which Jesus, as he appears in the Gospels, does not venture to expect while our present life on the earth lasts.

But the teachings of Jesus are clearly foreshadowed in Isaiah 58: 6 *et seq.*: "Is not this the fast that I have chosen . . . to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him . . . Then shall thy light break forth as the morning . . . and thy righteousness shall go be-

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

fore thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward."

The miraculous cures of Jesus are equally forestalled in Isaiah. In Matthew 8:17 we read: "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." Matthew 11:5 makes Jesus say: "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear." In Isaiah 35:5 we read concerning the coming of God: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing." Redemption, too, is forecast in Isaiah (61:1): "He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound."

In Isaiah 53:2 *et seq.* it is said: "He shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him,



## JESUS : A MYTH

---

there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

The story of the Passion, compiled on a foundation of moods and laments out of the Old Testament, appears particularly prepared by the pictures in the Second Isaiah of the sufferings of the personified Israel. Here we find that widespread idea of one suffering in place of, or on behalf of, another which occurs in a number of ancient religions as well as later in Christianity. Here the principle of vicarious atonement is already the central point.

Isaiah 53:4 says: "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned



## JESUS: A MYTH

---

every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. . . . He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

In Acts 8:28 *et seq.* the passage from the same chapter of Isaiah mentioning the lamb led to the slaughter is expressly interpreted to the inquiring Ethiopian eunuch as a reference to Jesus.

### § 5

Sir James George Frazer, probably the foremost mythologist of our own day, says in “The Golden Bough”: “The transfer of evil, the principle of vicarious suffering, is commonly understood and practiced by races who stand on a low level of social and intellectual culture. It occurs in the history of classic antiquity, while the peoples still remained in barbarism. The typical example is the sacrifice of Iphigenia.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As only the abridged edition of “The Golden Bough” is at my disposal, the greater part of this quotation has had to be translated without proper collation with the original. *Transl.*

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

The cult of the Syrian god Attis had in common with Christianity the cleansing of the soul by the shedding of blood. And it is significant to note how its rites provided that the blood of the sacrificial ox should be shed on the very spot where the church of St. Peter's stands.

No one any longer regards the Gospel according to St. John as documentary evidence of historic facts. It is pure symbolism, pure theology. It introduces once more in rejuvenated form the Messianic conception which had existed for centuries before.

The statements of the earlier, so-called Synoptic Gospels are here turned into symbolism and mysticism. The number of miracles related are seven. The lame man is healed on the Sabbath, which is the seventh day. The long line of years during which he remained impotent symbolize the Jewish people waiting for the Messiah. The act of healing itself (John 5: 17) is described as a symbol of the entire activity of Jesus. The multiplying of the loaves is a symbol of the

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

distribution of the bread of life. The miracle of Jesus walking on the water implies that the Messiah is victorious, that he is a spirit, that he is the Word returning once more to its original eternity. The curing of the blind man means that the Messiah is the light of the world; the raising of Lazarus from the dead, that he is life.

The mysticism of numbers recurs everywhere. Jesus walks three times through Galilee, and three times through Judea. The number of miracles wrought in each case are three. Three times (John 13: 18-21-26) he denounces Judas as the one who is to betray him. Jesus rises from the grave on the third day, and three times he lets himself be seen thereafter.

This Gospel seems to have been produced in the first half of the second century. But as far as it is possible to tell, the gradually constructed and repeatedly edited compilations known as the Synoptic Gospels must be at least fifty years younger than the genuine parts of the epistles ascribed to Paul.

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

Paul, i.e., Little Saul, must have been an impetuous and dangerous little man, concerning whom we are told in the Acts that he obtained work at Corinth from a Jewish married couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who were tentmakers by occupation, and who had been exiled from Rome by the Emperor Claudius.

It is reported that those two had been implicated in the riots mentioned by Suetonius in a famous and puzzling passage which seems to have been copied from some earlier writer of annals. He says:

“As the Jews, incited by Chrestus, incessantly caused disturbances, he (Claudius) banished them from Rome.”

Chrestus at that time was a name frequently given to slaves and freedmen. It occurred no less than eighty times in the inscriptions found beneath the church of St. Peter's at Rome when this received certain additions during the latter part of the Renaissance.

Aquila and Priscilla were probably among the Jews thus banished from Rome. They made their living as builders of tents or huts,

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

and they took into their service as a fellow-worker this fiery, incalculable and ungovernable little Saul of Cilicia.

The epistles which bear his name, genuine or not, are far older than the Gospels. The author of these epistles had never seen Jesus, and he neither knows nor communicates anything at all about the real life of Jesus.

The man called Paul has a purely theological conception of Jesus. According to Colossians 1:15-16, it is as follows: "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him."

By statements like these we are, indeed, carried far afield from the eloquent and enthusiastic young son of a Galilean house-builder who, on account of his purely spiritual agitation, is said to have been executed by the Roman governor at Jerusalem. But

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

farther still we seem to be removed from the feeblest glimpse of sound human sense.

For many years the dispute has raged as to which parts of the epistles ascribed to Paul might be regarded as genuine. For in all of those epistles later interpolations were suspected, while some of them could not have been written by him at all. The likelihood seems to be that only the epistles to the Galatians, the Romans, and parts of the first one to the Corinthians can be held genuine.

The problem may have lost some of its interest in these days. Even if they should be older than the Gospels, the Pauline writings may well be antedated. And there are persons, like the Hollander Van Manen, who firmly maintain that nothing at all indicates the existence in the first century of an "apostle" preaching along the line of thought ascribed to Paul. It seems probable that the establishment of larger congregations that were no longer Jewish, but purely Christian, did not take place until the second century.

An apparently ironic, but quite seriously

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

meant theory by the prominent English Bible student, Thomas Whittaker, suggests that the true founder of historic Christianity was the High Priest Caiaphas on account of his "advice to the Jews," which, according to the author of the Gospel of St. John (11:50-51), must have been put in his mouth by divine inspiration:

"Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. *And this he spake not of himself:* but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation."

And Caiaphas is an historic personality, known and named as such by Flavius Josephus, which cannot be said of Jesus, as the forged passage in the "Antiquities of the Jews" (18:63) long ago has been recognized as such by even the most conservative students.

Contemporaneously with Josephus there existed another writer who, like him, was both a soldier and an historian. He is said to have



## JESUS: A MYTH

---

been a countryman of Jesus in the narrowest sense, as he hailed from the very district where Jesus was said to have been born. His name was Justus of Tiberias. Like Josephus, he wrote on "The Jewish Wars." In addition he wrote a "Chronicle of the Jewish Kings from Moses to Agrippa II." Both works are now lost, but they were read in the ninth century by Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople, who expressed astonishment at finding them contain no more mention of Jesus than did the works of Josephus.

### § 6

The pagan writers of Rome give us no undisputed reference to Jesus. The first mention of him occurs in a letter from Pliny the Younger to the Emperor Trajan, written in the year 111 or 112, when Pliny had been sent as *legatus propraetore* to the provinces of Bithynia and Pontus, and was said to have found both of them rife with Christianity. But can the letter be held genuine? We must



## JESUS : A MYTH

---

note that the only form in which it has reached us is as a manuscript completely separated from the rest of his letters. Furthermore, in connection with his references to the Christians, Pliny speaks of "Clement of Rome" as a well-known man who really has written the epistles ascribed to him. But the consensus of expert opinion is that, of these epistles, only the first one from the church at Rome to the Corinthians can possibly be genuine. And this one was not recognized until the year 170. How, then, could Pliny know anything about it? This circumstance throws considerable suspicion on Pliny's mention of the Christians in the 96th epistle. This is what he is supposed to have written to Trojan:

"As for those who denied that they were Christians, I felt entitled to set them free as soon as they had worshipped the gods and sacrificed to your statue. All these (who claimed not to be Christians) paid homage to your statue and blasphemed Christ. But they maintained that their only error or misconduct lay in their having gathered, in accord-

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

ance with the habit established among them, at dawn of a day fixed in advance to sing by turns a song (*carmen*) to Christ as if he were a god (*Christo quasi deo*)."

If, as seems highly uncertain, this passage should be genuine, then Pliny saw in the conduct of the Christians a public menace in so far as this new god, which had been grafted on the ancient jealous god of the Jews, and to whom they sang songs, seemed incompatible with the other gods of the empire, to whom the worshippers of the Messiah would not offer incense and wine, and in so far as he was also incompatible with the cult of the deified Cæsar.

All in all, there are only two references to Christ in the Latin literature. Both appear in works by Roman writers who lived around the time of transition from the first to the second century. These are the works of Tacitus and Suetonius, both of them friends of the younger Pliny.

In the "Annals" of Tacitus (XV: 44), with their markedly dramatic arrangement, we

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

read in connection with the burning of Rome under Nero :

“Nero suspected certain persons of being responsible for this crime. These he sentenced to the most cruel tortures. They are the people whom everybody hates for their infamies, and who vulgarly are called *Chrestiani*. The originator of the name (*Christus*) was sentenced to death by the procurator, Pontius Pilate, during the reign of Tiberius.”<sup>1</sup>

It seems impossible for any unbiassed critic to doubt that this passage represents an interpolation, a forged addition to the text, inserted long after the days of Tacitus by some monk or Christian copyist. It is formulated in closest accordance with the Christian tradition that gradually had become established.

<sup>1</sup> The Arthur Murphy version of “The Annals,” confirmed by reference to a German translation, renders this passage as follows: “In order, if possible, to remove the imputation (that Rome had been set on fire by his orders), he (Nero) determined to transfer the guilt to others. For this purpose he punished, with exquisite torture, a race of men detested for their evil practices, by vulgar appellation commonly called Christians. The name was derived from Christ, who in the reign of Tiberius, suffered under Pontius Pilate, the procurator of Judaea. *Transl.*

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

*Chrestiani*, which is the Greek equivalent of *Christiani*, is an appellation that hardly can have been known to Tacitus when he wrote "The Annals." The Greek word Christ, in place of Messiah, did not come into use until the time of Trajan. None of the Evangelists employs the word Christians in connection with those who followed Jesus. The only passage (Acts 11:20) where mention is made of the conversions of Gentiles has this movement originate in Antioch. Tacitus does not mention the name of Jesus, and apparently has not heard of it. He seems to consider Christ a personal name and does not know that it signifies the Messiah. What is particularly suspicious, however, is that, like a Christian of a later age, he speaks of Pilate as if this personality must be familiar to the readers without any additional explanations.

No work by Tacitus has reached us without forged insertions. The faith shown by Gibbon in the purity of the older Tacitus manuscripts has been abandoned long ago.

The reason to believe this passage a falsifi-

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

cation is the stronger because what Tacitus tells . . . or appears to tell . . . about the relation of Nero to the Christians cannot possibly be true. It is not imaginable that, as early as in the days of Nero, the followers of Jesus in Rome could have formed a congregation large enough to attract public attention and so arouse the hatred of the people as to become subject to an accusation of having fired the city. And how could Tacitus, who never took the doctrines of the Jews seriously, but (according to Tertullian) believed their god, whom he never distinguished from that of the Christians, to be a man with the head of an ass like that on the famous *graffito* <sup>1</sup> of

<sup>1</sup> "Graffito," the Encyclopedia Britannica explains, "is the Italian word meaning 'scribbling' or 'scratchings,' adopted by archaeologists as a general term for the casual writings, rude drawings and markings on ancient buildings, in distinction from the more formal or deliberate writings known as 'inscriptions' . . . The most famous *graffito* yet discovered is that generally accepted as representing a caricature of Christ upon the cross, found on the walls of the Domus Gelotiana on the Palatine in 1857. . . . Deeply scratched in the wall is the figure of a man clad in the short *tunica*, with one hand upraised in salutation to another figure, with the head of an ass, or possibly a horse, hanging on a cross; beneath is written in rude Greek letters: 'Anaxamenos worships (his) god.' " *Transl.*

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

the crucifixion . . . how could he regard the presence in Rome of a small Jewish sect as a menace to the empire?

No reasonable man of to-day believes the legend which made Nero himself set fire to Rome. Suetonius, who was willing to suspect him of anything, had heard of no rumor pointing to him as the guilty man. Nor was there any reason why Nero should accuse the Christians of having started the fire. They called themselves Jessenes or Nazareans, Chosen Ones or Saints, and so on. Commonly they were regarded as Jews. They observed the Mosaic Law, and the rest of the population could not distinguish them from other Jews. They kept to themselves and took care to attract as little attention as possible.

The story about the living torches that has come down to us from Tacitus, seems the product of an imagination incited by the reading of later Christian martyrology. Punishment by fire did not exist in Rome at the time of Nero. The gardens where these torches were supposed to have been set up had been

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

turned into a refuge for the unfortunates who had been rendered homeless by the burning of the city. They were crowded with tents and wooden huts, among which no one would dream of erecting pyres for the burning of criminals.

The pagan writers exhibit no knowledge of these horrors. The older Christian authors knew as little of those "living torches," which would have furnished such excellent material for propaganda. The earliest mention of them occurs in a notorious forgery from the fourth century . . . the wholly imaginary correspondence between Seneca and the Apostle Paul.<sup>1</sup> A more extensive mention of them is made by Sulpicius Severus, who died in 403, but it is mixed with such Christian legends as those about the death of Simon Magus and the Roman episcopate of St. Peter. As a rule, the words used by Sulpicius are identical with those ascribed to Tacitus. It

<sup>1</sup> Chapter XII of the Epistles of Paul and Seneca refers to the burning of Rome, and to the punishment of Jews and Christians as responsible for it, but has nothing to say about any "living torches." *Transl.*



## JESUS: A MYTH

---

is open to doubt whether the text of Tacitus used by Sulpicius contained the famous reference to the Christians . . . *odium generis humani*. Otherwise it must have become known to other Christian writers who quoted Tacitus. The likelihood is that the passage in "The Annals" (15:44) was transferred to Tacitus from Sulpicius by some monkish scribe . . . for the greater glory of God, and to strengthen the continuity of Christian tradition by pagan evidence.

As far as we can make out, then, there exists in contemporary Roman literature no genuine reference supporting the historic existence of Jesus.

### § 7

After a time Paul was visited at Philippi by two fellow-believers, Silas Silvanus and Timotheus, who are said to have brought him news of a church founded at Thessalonica by means generously furnished by the inhabitants of Philippi. Among these was a woman



## JESUS : A MYTH

---

named Lydia, a seller of purple, from the city of Thyatira. She opened her house to Paul and his companions, and entertained them there. (Philippians 4:6; Acts 16:14-15.)

Paul, who in reality was the founder of the Christian religion, has nothing to tell us about the personality of Jesus and had never seen him. No more was he ever seen by the . . . actually anonymous . . . authors of the Gospels. When Paul (I Corinthians 9:1) exclaims: "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" what he has in mind is his vision on the road to Damascus. And what is popularly called the Gospel according to St. Mark, St. Luke, and so on, means only, judging by the exact word used in the texts (*katá*), that the Gospel in question was supposed to have been written down by a follower of the disciple after whom it was named . . . not that it had been written by that disciple in person. And not a line of those Gospels was put into writing until the activity of Paul had lasted many years.

With all his fiery exaltation, this Paul

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

seems, as far as we can make out, to have been a rather dreadful person . . . one of those pathological natures in whom enthusiasm suddenly turns into hatred, while hatred as suddenly turns into overflowing devotion.

All historic knowledge is, after all, uncertain. It is a fit saying, indeed, that the truth of history depends on the silence of dead men.

But this is what existing sources have to tell us. When the unfortunate Stephen was to be stoned for his dissenting faith in the Messiah, the first of his executioners, who found themselves hampered by their clothes, placed these at the feet of a young fanatic, Saul, who, according to his own statement, regarded that murder with satisfaction and, for that reason, was more than willing to guard the clothing of those committing it. Blinded by his passion, he thought it a duty to do something against the Nazareans. And this duty he fulfilled in Jerusalem, where he obtained authority from the High Priest to cast many of the devout into prison. He is

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

also said to have consented when some of them were put to death by stoning.<sup>1</sup> This is supposed to have happened in the year 37. His sudden conversion took place the next year. Afterwards, as before, he was an agitator by profession.

### § 8

He was born in the year 10 or 12 at Tarsus in Cilicia. His name was latinized into Paul only after he had become the Apostle to the Gentiles. His family hailed from Giscala in Galilee and was supposed to belong to the tribe of Benjamin. His father was a Roman citizen, having gained this status through services rendered, or having, perhaps, inherited it from some ancestor who acquired it by purchase. Like all the better Jewish families, this one belonged to the party of the Pharisees. Even after his break with this

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to compare Dr. Brandes' unquestioning acceptance of these statements in the Acts with his categorical declaration in Section 3 (p. 27) that the Jews in Palestine at that time had no jurisdiction whatever and so could not be held responsible for the death of Jesus. *Transl.*

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

party, Paul retained its enthusiasm and intensity as well as its acridity of speech.

Tarsus was at that time a flourishing city, its population mixed Greek and Aramean. The Jews were numerous as in all mercantile centres. Literary appreciation was widespread, and no other city, not even Athens or Alexandria, could show a greater wealth of scientific institutions. This does not mean that Saul received a thorough Greek education. The Jews rarely attended schools of profane learning. These schools taught above all the use of a pure Greek. Had Saul learned from one of them, it is not likely that Paul would have written, or rather dictated, such an un-Greecian language, wholly strange in its construction, and so full of Aramaic and Syrian expressions that it can hardly have been intelligible to an educated Greek of that day. Without being ashamed at his lack of what was then called erudition, he speaks of himself (II Corinthians 11:6) as *idiotes to logo*, "rude in speech," and his intention is, of course, to accentuate how little such things

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

matter. Evidently he thought in the Syro-Chaldean tongue, which was also his native language, and the one he used with preference even when he talked to himself or heard strange voices addressing him.

What he preaches has no relation whatever to Greek philosophy. The frequently mentioned quotation from Menander's lost play, "Thaïs or Good Manners Spoiled by Bad Company," had become a popular saw used by many who had never read Menander.

The other two Greek quotations that have been discovered, occur in epistles that hardly can be held genuine. One of them is found in Titus 1 : 12 and reads as follows: "One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies." It is ascribed to Epimenides, who lived in the sixth century B. C., and who by the ancients was regarded as a great sooth-sayer. The other one, in Acts 17 : 28, runs thus: "For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

poets have said." The poets here referred to are Aratus of Cilicia and Cleanthes of Lycia. By "him" they meant Zeus, of course.

It is easy to see that the greater part of young Saul's education came from the Talmud. He is guided by words rather than by thoughts. A single word will make him pursue a line of thought far removed from his starting point. In one place only does the First Epistle to the Corinthians (1:1 *et seq.*) rise to such heights that few other passages compare with it in fiery enthusiasm or fluent eloquence. But we have also to admit that such a fine student as Van Manen regards it as a late interpolation. These are the beautiful words I have in mind: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing."

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

They are followed by a number of equally exalted outpourings . . . glimpses of a fiery mind the like of which had not been, and would not again be, seen for centuries.

But it is well to consider the frame into which these gems have been set: dull, sophistical arguments like that of the preceding chapter with its boresomely prolonged simile of the body that is one, and yet has many members, and with its application to the church and its support by reasons like these: "If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?" And so on, *ad infinitum*. Or let us see what follows this exalted praise of charity. It is a chapter so loose in its reasoning that the established version of the text substitutes "speaking with unknown tongues" for the original "speaking with the tongue," which implied the production of inarticulate sounds during a state of ecstasy. And so we get these passages: "For



## JESUS : A MYTH

---

he that speaketh in an unknown tongue<sup>1</sup> speaketh not unto men, but unto God : for no man understandeth him ; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself ; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church ; etc.” All of which is nothing but a lot of empty phrases.

### § 9

The father of Saul had determined early to make him a rabbi, but had given him a trade in accordance with the manner and usage of the time. The young man became a tent-maker, working with the coarse leather coming out of Cilicia or building huts out of brick. He had no independent means and was very polite. When not irritated or enraged by passion, he was well-mannered, and even cordial, but otherwise irascible and given to jealousy.

<sup>1</sup> The editions of the Authorized Version of the Bible issued under the auspices of the Established Church of England and by the American Bible Society have the word “unknown” in italics to indicate that it has been inserted by the translators to clarify the original text. *Transl.*

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

In appearance he seems to have been rather unimpressive. According to early Christian documents, whose reliability may be disputed, but whose descriptions do not seem wholly imaginary, he was ugly, small of stature, squat and humpbacked.<sup>1</sup> When he speaks of his own body, as in II Corinthians 11:30 and 12:5, 9, 10, he calls attention to his own material infirmities which contrasted so sharply with the strength of his spirit. He pictures himself as a man who, in spite of all mental superiority, is weak and exhausted, without anything in his appearance to impress others, and yet having experienced moments of ecstasy during which he did not know whether he remained in the flesh or not. At the same time he suffers from some secret failing, a "thorn in the flesh," sent by God to keep him from excessive pride. This thorn consists in "buffetings by the messenger of Satan"

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Brandes evidently refers to the Acts of Paul and Thecla, where, however, Chapter I, verse 7, reads as follows: "At length they saw a man coming, of a low stature, bald on the head, crooked thighs, handsome legs, hollow-eyed; had a crooked nose; full of grace." *Transl.*

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

(II Corinthians 12:7). Thrice he had besought the Lord that it might depart from him, and thrice he had got the discouraging answer: "My grace is sufficient for thee." This thorn does not refer to any sexual temptation. Time and again he lets us know how cold he is of temperament. See in particular I Corinthians 7:7, where he says: "For I would that all men were even as myself" . . . i.e., free from being attracted by women.

As a young man he came to Jerusalem and is supposed to have studied under Gamaliel, who showed considerable tolerance, although stern of nature and reckoned a Pharisee. Saul, on the other hand, developed into a wild fanatic, agitated and agitating, and clinging with veritable rage to the national past. When the first Christian church in Jerusalem had been scattered, he began to visit other cities.

At that time, when the madness of Caligula had shaken Roman authority, there seems to have appeared a group of people at Damascus who believed that the Messiah had arrived.

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

To counteract this movement, Saul appears to have obtained authority from the High Priest Theophilus, son of Hanan, to arrest these renegades and to bring them in chains to Jerusalem.

Finally, on reaching that earthly paradise formed by the gardens of Damascus, he seems to have become disgusted with his own position as executioner. He remembered those whom he had persecuted and caused to be tortured. He saw a light in heaven that shone all around him, and he heard a voice speaking his native tongue, that warned and admonished him. He suffered an epileptic attack, out of which he awoke changed and converted.

### § 10

At any rate, he was another man after his visit to Damascus. He is now all hope and faith. Like a pillar of fire, he precedes the hosts that flock to him. Is he flaming with the charity he has praised so splendidly? It

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

sends waves of fire through him instead of burning within him like a sacred lamp.

An example picked at random will prove this. A small church had been formed in Corinth, but among its members the flesh still held sway. The believers in the Messiah had been told that the law of Moses no longer was in force, but that anything was allowable to them, and so they fell into immoral living. The women went abroad without veils. The love feasts of which the communion formed a part degenerated into wild orgies of eating. Meat left over from the sacrifices to the Greek gods were bought in the market-place and eaten with good appetite. There were even those who did not hesitate to take part in pagan religious feasts. But the most dreadful news reaching Paul was that a member of the church had married his divorced step-mother while his father still remained alive. Paul lost all command of himself. He raged. And he was not softened by the genuine remorse of the sinner. In the very epistle that overflows with praise to charity, he foretells

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

a miraculous punishment (I Corinthians 5:3-5). He has decided in the name of the Lord, and with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver the sinner unto Satan for the destruction of his flesh, in order that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

His anger knew no bounds. But the worst of it was that it made him ridiculous when the miracle did not materialize. He was held up to scorn as a braggart. He tried to terrify by letters, but he did not come in person. (II Corinthians 10:9.) Thus he embittered his own life by his incessant agitation and exhortation, and by his constant fight against enemies within and without the camp of the sanctified ones.

He insists on being in the right. He loves to dispute. One may even venture so far as to call him querulous. One has only to hear himself describe his relation to Peter (Galatians 2:11 *et seq.*). No word is too offensive to be used against his rival. He accuses him both of cowardice and hypocrisy: "But

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" And this is followed by a lot of almost incomprehensible thundering.

But all this, into which my line of reasoning has been led by various associations of ideas . . . these battles within the oldest groups of Messianic believers between those who were of Jewish descent and those who were not . . . all this and many other facts and problems are



## JESUS : A MYTH

---

of secondary importance in comparison with the one great truth that long ago dawned on men who had liberated themselves from the academic prejudices of professional theologians . . . men like Arthur Drews in Germany, J. M. Robertson in England, Alfred Loisy and Paul Louis Couchoud in France.<sup>1</sup>

In its seed and in its main spirit, Christianity existed from the moment when the Messiah of the prophets, Isaiah's "servant of the Lord," the persecuted righteous man of the Psalms and the Wisdom of Solomon, became fused into a single figure, that of Jahve himself changed into a god that dies, rises again, and will return to sit in judgment on the world.

It is from this fundamental view on existence, this duplication of Jahve into a Jahve-Messiah or Jahve-Jesus, that Christianity starts. This Jesus was not born by Joseph and Mary, but by faith, hope and charity (Couchoud).

<sup>1</sup>To which names should also be added that of William Benjamin Smith in this country. *Transl.*

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

Nothing but this kind of Jahve-Messiah is known in what bears the name of the Revelation of St. John, which was a Jewish apocalypse, an imitation of the Book of Daniel, before it became a Christian apocalypse.

Nothing else was known to Paul.

Later the common people's curiosity and desire for information, as well as their inability to achieve such spiritual heights, resulted in the collection of traditional anecdotes; mystic and mythical stories about the birth of Jesus and Herod's slaying of the children (in imitation of Pharaoh's attempt to slay the infant Moses, who probably never existed either); legends about the temptation of Jesus by the devil; numerous striking saws and parables uttered by the wise men of the age; stories about a noble-minded and highly superior man of the people; stories of miraculous cures and feats, symbols, visions, and so on . . . all of which was then boiled together into the strangely composed mess that is called the Gospel according to St. Mark.

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

And from this Gospel all the others were derived.

### § II

Messianic hope and Messianic faith are not the only sources of the original Christianity. Close to these lies another one, different . . . the belief that to us seems so strange, not in the doctrines preached by an enthusiastic youth from Galilee, but in his rising from the grave.

It is extremely difficult for a man of the present day to grasp the world of paradoxical ideas in which, two thousand years ago, men without any background of Graeco-Roman education lived in Anatolia, in Syria and Egypt, in all the countries to the east of the Mediterranean. It is startling to find in I Corinthians 15:4-15 that Paul based his entire preaching on the conviction that a young man supposed to be the son of God . . . and thus himself a divine being, invulnerable and immortal . . . had let him-

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

self be buried after dissembling the appearance of a corpse, only to rise again on the third day from the grave. Paul says: "He rose again the third day according to the scriptures. He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once. . . . After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also." Farther on he says: "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain."

In other words, the cults of Adonis, Attis, Osiris, and so on, lead us to the starting point of original Christianity, which was the belief in resurrection. What lay at the heart of the worshipping of Adonis and Attis in Syria and Palestine, and of similar religious formulations in Anatolia and Egypt, was *that a young god by the harshness of fate was com-*

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

*pelled to die in the flower of his youth; that he was mourned by women, buried in the earth or in the Nile, and again brought to life, whereupon the mourning turned into rejoicing.*

### § 12

After the exile the Jewish world was saturated with Babylonian ideas.

At times one seems to catch echoes of the great Babylonian "Epic of Gilgamesh." Xisuthros drifts calmly through the storm on the waters of the Deluge; Jesus sleeps calmly in the boat during the storm. The mountain on which Xisuthros became deified corresponds to the one on which Jesus was transfigured. Who can tell whether the herd of two thousand swine which plunged into the water and disappeared after Jesus had miraculously exorcised the evil spirits were not a sort of symbol of sinful humanity destroyed by the Deluge, a legend that also came from Babylonia?

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

With Babylonian came also Iranian myths . . . those belonging to the religion of Zaratrusthra. Another powerful influence derived from the cult of Mithra, which, like the growing Christianity, had for its object purification, redemption, resurrection, and a union with God like that of children with their father. The Holy Ghost, who appears in the Avesta, recurs here again.

In Anatolia, the ancient cult of Attis-Cybele was fecundated partly by related Greek mysteries from the west, and partly by the cult of Mithra from the east.

The basic thought, which meets us in Paul as well, is sorrow at the dying out of life in nature and joy at its restoration.

Attis dies young. Out of his blood sprout violets. His resurrection was celebrated with singing and feasting.

Beyond the confines of Judaism as well as in Paul, the miserable condition of the world was explained by presumption (*adikia*). Most of the thoughts regarded as peculiarly Christian did not originate in that religion,

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

but sprang from the mixture of races in the world empire and were nursed by strong currents of intercommunication.

As an earthly mortal of flesh and bones, the Jesus mentioned in the Gospels had passed out of contemporary memory within a few years.

Not even Mark, generally held the eldest of the Gospel writers, had any idea of how he looked. He is incapable of giving us an image of him. Even in the Gospel named after Mark, he appears not as a true human being, but as a magician, a worker of miracles, and one who heals by the touch of his hands.

Such miraculous cures are numerous in all the Gospels, but as the writers of these had no conception of science, which is Greek rather than Jewish in its spirit, it occurs to no one among them to let Jesus, like a Pasteur, provide a remedy that can be used for the curing of any number of cases. Their ideas of medicine are inseparable from suggestion and quackery. They are trying to impress the reader by naïve stories like that in Mark



## JESUS: A MYTH

---

2:4, where we are told that the pressure of those wishing to see Jesus cure one stricken with palsy was so great that the sick man could not be brought in the ordinary way, but the roof had to be taken off and the bed with the man in it lowered from above.

Mark is concise and comparatively sparing with the miraculous. He is aware of no genealogy or virginal birth and has no stories to tell from the childhood of Jesus. When Matthew and Luke have so much more to tell, this does not depend on their access to any historical sources unknown to Mark, but on the simple fact that the farther they got from the time when Jesus lived, the more people knew about him. And this knowledge reached its fullness only when the original figure was quite forgotten . . . but with the difference that by that time he had become the son in his relation to God the Father, which relation has its prototype in Babylonian mythology. The mother with the child worshipped by the Catholic Church has its correspondences in Isis and in Ishtar. The term "in the

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

fullness of time" comes from Babylon. Jesus as opposed to the Pharisees corresponds with Buddha as opposed to the Brahmins. There are reminiscences of Buddhism in the story of the temptation as well as in the natural phenomena accompanying the death of Jesus. The route by water from India led to Egypt. Alexandria was early a pivotal point.

Thus it may be asserted truthfully that, although the Messianic ideal may have been the chief element in shaping the new religion, the impression of it became blended with impressions from a number of other surrounding religions.

### § 13

In most Asiatic and Egyptian cults, the mother of the god undergoes a transformation that makes her not only the parent but the mistress of her son. In the Gospels on the other hand, as we have seen already, there is instead a certain hostility in the son toward the mother . . . an hostility which is to suggest

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

his release from all earthly bonds, and to stamp him as pure spirit. In the course of the development to which the Catholic Church has been subject, however, this false relationship is quite lost sight of. In all its artistic presentations, the son shows devotion or reverence toward the mother.

It is quite noteworthy that all the women standing close to Jesus by virtue of their admiration or adoration are named Mary like his mother, as, for instance, Mary, the sister of Martha, and Mary Magdalen. In Asia, it seems, the mother of the god always bore a name beginning with the letter *ma*. Among others mentioned by the Orientalist, P. Jensen, are Maria; Mariamna; Maritala, the mother of Krishna; Mariana from Mariandynium in Bethynia, and Mandane, the mother of Cyrus, whom the Jews looked upon as the Messiah of the Lord. Thus we read in Isaiah 45:1: "Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus."

There may be mythology even in the name of Mary. But that the figure of Jesus be-

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

came so lost in oblivion that none of the Gospel writers had seen him, and that even Paul had seen him only in a vision, is far less to be wondered at if that figure itself was legendary.

He has not left behind a single written line. Perhaps he did not even know how to write. A beautiful passage in the fourth Gospel, generally recognized as a later interpolation, represents him as writing in the sand. It is too bad that a personality that has kept Europe astir for two thousand years should do his writing in sand only. But some one among his followers or adherents must have known how to write. If his words were so precious to them, why did they never make an exact record of what he said? Why were they satisfied with putting into his mouth a conglomeration of excerpts from the Talmud and popular saws and parables? They have not even told us where he used to live? On the other hand they tell us that he stayed as a guest now with a leper and now with a Pharisee, and then again with Mary and Martha . . . two women who seem mere allegories

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

of the Jewry that lost itself in ceremonial observations and ostentatious acts of holiness, on one side, and, on the other, of the Gentile Christianity toward which the Gospel writer leans on account of its greater receptivity toward new teachings.

Even the most exquisite tales told about Jesus have assumed no settled form in the fancy of the Evangelists. Thus the legend of the woman who brings an ointment to Jesus has taken several different shapes.

The very identity of this woman varies. In Mark 14: 3 we read of an unnamed woman who comes to Jesus while he is partaking of a meal in the house of Simon the Leper. She carries in her hand an alabaster box of genuine and very precious spikenard ointment. This box she breaks and pours the ointment on *his head*, for which act she becomes exposed to severe criticism on the part of *those present*. In Matthew, this criticism is uttered by the *disciples themselves*.

In Luke 7: 36 *et seq.*, Simon the Leper has turned into a Pharisee . . . which proves that

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

the relation of Jesus to the Pharisees was not as bad as it is sometimes represented. In this connection we must not forget the words put into his mouth by Matthew 23:3: "All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do." The woman in Luke has become one "in the city, who had sinned." She washes his *feet* with her tears, wipes them with her hair, kisses them, and then anoints them with the ointment.

In John 12:3 the scene has changed once more. Jesus is having supper with Lazarus, whom he has raised from the dead. Here it is Mary who anoints his feet with costly ointment and wipes them with her hair. And here again it is the disciples that grumble on behalf of the poor.

It is well to note what a powerful social movement was reflected in Christianity at its first start. Evidently the communistic element of those early days was pushed more and more into the background as the Christian communities came to include many wealthy

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

members, and the elimination was completed when Christianity became the established religion of the state.

The anger of the disciples at the waste of the costly ointment brought Jesus by that woman proves that originally a strong hatred was entertained against all forms of luxury. The ill-will harbored toward the rich is evidenced by the words which Mark 10:25 puts on the lips of Jesus: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." It is heard again in Mark 10:21, when Jesus tells the youth to sell whatever he has and give to the poor. Significant in this respect is also the parable in Luke 16:19 about the rich man who went to hell, while the poor man, Lazarus, after his death was carried by angels into the bosom of Abraham. Nor can it be doubted that when, in the Sermon on the Mount, we are told that "blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of heaven," the words "in spirit" must be re-



## JESUS : A MYTH

---

garded as an interpolation made at a later time when the communistic tendencies were frowned on as a growing menace.

And just as much of what has been taken as history by thoughtless readers is nothing but allegory, so there is a lot of astrology in other seemingly historical passages.

Significant it is, for instance, that the longest day of the year has been given to St. John, while the shortest, when light begins its conquering battle against darkness, has become the particular day of Jesus, Christmas, the day of nativity.

Characteristic of the astrological bearing of these old legends is the constant shifting of Easter. One may wonder why Paul did not give the converted Greeks and Romans a certain day to observe. And while the Catholic Church claims to know the exact day when Peter and Paul were executed at Rome, it is not aware of the day when Jesus was crucified . . . although one might think the latter more important by far.

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

### § 14

A logical way of finding what is really historic would be to start by eliminating what cannot possibly be held such, and then see what remains. It is to be feared that the outcome would be the same as when Peer Gynt began to peel the onion by taking off one layer at the time. There was "a terrific number" of them, and always he hoped that the core would come next. But in the end he discovered to his great disgust that, in its innermost inwardness, the onion was nothing but layers.

Once upon a time, as far back as the 90's, Anatole France wrote a famous short story, "The Procurator of Judea," in which he attempted to display the utmost possible scepticism by representing Pilate as having completely forgotten the death of Jesus. To him the thought was still foreign which later was expressed by his young friend and physician, Paul Louis Couchoud, namely that the story of Jesus itself is nothing but a legend, so that

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

not a single detail remains to indicate the historic character of that figure.<sup>1</sup>

The Gospel of St. Mark, which comes first in the New Testament, opens with a perfectly impossible genealogical table of Joseph, the betrothed of Mary. The object is to prove his descent from King David. The whole question is meaningless, as immediately afterwards it is asserted . . . as a second-hand report, of course . . . that Joseph was not the father of Jesus, so that his ancestry could have no importance whatsoever. But the family tree itself is grotesque. As far as I can make out, there is in one place three hundred years between a father and his son. In Matthew this table covers 26 generations. In Luke it has 41. The wording of Matthew 1:16 is different in the oldest manuscripts and in the printed New Testament, where the words

<sup>1</sup> The same idea had already been expressed with all possible clearness and emphasis by Pastor A. Kalthoff of Bremen in his two notable works, "Das Christusproblem" (1903) and "Die Entstehung des Christentums" (1904), as well as in his pamphlet, "Was wissen wir von Jesus?" (1904). *Transl.*

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

"who is called Christ" have been added at the end of the verse.

But as it was Jesus, and not Joseph, who ought to have descended from David, and as Jesus was not even a descendant of Joseph, the whole table is nonsense.

The next chapter gives us the charming tale of the three wise men, or *magi*, who later were transformed into three kings. They came "in the days of Herod the king," although Herod died four years before the beginning of the Christian era. As Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, they came to Jerusalem from Anatolia, which is translated into "the east." They said: "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him." Then follow Herod's questioning of the wise men, his lying assertion that he, too, wished to worship the child, the story of the star that stood above the house of Joseph, and the wise men's presentation of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the child.

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

It is a pretty fairy tale, but any refutation of its historic reliability may be held superfluous.

### § 15

The next link in the story consists of the appearance of the angel causing the flight to Egypt, which took place while (the long ago deceased) Herod, through his executioners, slew all the children that were in Bethlehem from two years old and under . . . a slaughter of innocents which history, for good reasons, does not record anywhere else.

It represents a double imitation of legends in the Old Testament. First we have the story of Pharaoh's attempt to rid Egypt of the Jews (Exodus 1: 15 *et seq.*) by demanding of the Jewish midwives that they watch the sex of every new-born child closely and kill all boys, while the girl babies are permitted to live. The midwives answer shrewdly that the Jewish women are not like those of Egypt: "they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them." Whereupon

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

Pharaoh charges all his people to cast all newly born Jewish boys into the river, while the girls are left alive. Then the well-known story lets the daughter of Pharaoh find the infant Moses in an ark of bulrushes that had been set afloat on the river. All of which is quite unknown to the native historians of Egypt.

The other parallel passage from the Old Testament used in building up the story about the slaughter of the children at Bethlehem came from I Kings 11:15 *et seq.*, where we are told how Hadad, of the royal house of David,<sup>1</sup> escaped the massacre that took place when Joab spent six months cutting off every male in Edom. Hadad fled to Egypt, where he found great favor in the sight of Pharaoh. He remained there until he heard that David was dead . . . as Joseph and Mary stayed in Egypt until they heard of the death of Herod. The imitation is palpable.

<sup>1</sup>The Authorized Version says that Hadad "was of the king's seed in Edom." The authorized version of the Swedish Bible says that Hadad was "of royal seed, that was in Edom." *Transl.*

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

### § 16

Toward the end of Matthew's second chapter it is said that Joseph came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene."

Text-critical students have noticed that neither the Old Testament, nor Josephus or the Talmud, ever make mention of a city thus named. Outside of the Gospels, the name is unknown until the fourth century. Of course, certain modern theologians have tried to prove a firm conviction among the Christians of the first century that Jesus had his home in Nazareth. But this is nothing but guesswork based on the supposition that the Gospels existed during the first century in the shape they have now. The likelihood is that there never was a town named Nazareth. As early as the late 60's, Owen Meredith maintained that nothing indicated the existence of such a town prior to the Christian era. In our own day, Dr. Thomas Kelly Cheyne is quoted by J. M.



## JESUS: A MYTH

---

Robertson, in his "Christianity and Mythology," as having agreed with no less an expert than Professor Julius Wellhausen, in deriving the name from the district of Genesaret, which makes Nazareth identical with Galilee. By the study of Epiphanius, William B. Smith has proved that, prior to the Christian era, there existed a Jewish sect called the Nazareans. Their orthodoxy was so extreme that they recognized no authority subsequent to that of Joshua, whose name is identical with that of Jesus. In one way or another they seem to have become amalgamated with the Christians, who, however, changed the name from Nazareans to Nazoreans.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We have here to do with a confused medley of names, the interrelations of which still have to be cleared up. The Nazareans mentioned by Epiphanius (315-403) have generally been regarded as identical with the Ebionites, an early sect of Jewish Christians who rejected the entire Pauline trend, and recognized only one gospel, that of Matthew. It is now increasingly held that Epiphanius was right in separating those two sects, and that the Nazareans existed before the Christian era, perhaps as a part of the Therapeutae. The term Nazoreans for the early Christians is rendered Nazarenes in the Authorized Version. *Transl.*

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

At any rate, it seems quite improbable that the Nazareans (or Nazarenes), as the followers of Jesus are called in Acts 24:5, received their name from the supposed birth-place of Jesus. In Matthew, to be sure, the name is given this derivation, and he refers to a passage in the Prophets for confirmation. But no such passage has been found, and if Jesus were from Nazareth, he should have been called Nazarethene, or something like that, but not *Nazoraïos* or *Nazaraïos*. The word *Nazaraïos* seems to have meant protector, showing that the Nazareans were regarded as protectors in the same manner as the angel Michael, or Jahve himself. (See William B. Smith's "The Pre-Christian Jesus" and his article on "The Real Ancestry of Jesus"; also Dr. Paul Carus' article on "The Nazarene" in "The Open Court" of January, 1910; and finally Dr. Paul W. Schmiedel.) Perhaps the sect of the Nazareans originally was identical with the Nazarites, in the sense of consecrated or hallow, because they strove

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

to live cleanly, abstaining from wine and letting hair and beard grow. Perhaps the appellation merely refers to the famous passage in Isaiah 33:2<sup>1</sup> about the rod from the stem of David, as the word for a tender plant is *nazar*. Everything indicates that the city of Nazareth had its origin in a legend of late date.

### § 17

Quite in keeping with the style of the Old Testament, the third chapter of Matthew begins as follows: "In those days (i.e., not less than thirty years later) came John the Baptist." It is then said of him that he was the one "spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord." Here, as usual, the old text is translated incorrectly. In Isaiah there is nothing said about one crying in the wilderness. The proper reading of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Isaiah 11:1. *Transl.*

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

that passage (Isaiah 40:3) should be: "One cries, Make a highway for Jahve through the wilderness!"

This instance is by no means isolated. In their anxiety to discover confirmative prophecies in the Old Testament, the Evangelists frequently made bad mistakes. Their entire manner of thinking is foreign to the humanity of to-day. But what strikes one as most peculiar is their insufficient knowledge of writings that to them represented one vast collection of prophetic wisdom.

In Matthew, the angel's announcement of the birth of Jesus to Joseph (modeled on the Lord's announcement to Abraham of the birth of Isaac, and on the similar announcement by an angel to the mother of Samson) is explained as the fulfillment of a prophecy by Isaiah: "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son." But this passage was rendered incorrectly in the Greek translation which the Gospel writer used. In Isaiah (7:14) there is no talk of a virgin, but of a

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

woman. What the Evangelist had in mind was the promise to Ahaz: "Behold, a woman <sup>1</sup> shall conceive, and bear a son . . . For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings." No prophecy is implied concerning the child in question, and nothing is said about any virginal birth.

Similarly the Evangelist lets Jesus be born at Bethlehem for the express purpose of having the words in Micah 5:2 come true. But the translation of these words is quite wrong: "And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda; for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel." Here on the other hand, is the true wording of the passage in Micah: "Thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah,

<sup>1</sup> The Authorized Version, of course, renders this sentence in keeping with the Greek text: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive." Modern scholars have repeatedly pointed out that the word used in the original Hebrew text . . . *almah* . . . means both virgin and young woman. *Transl.*

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

least among the places of Judah, out of thee shall come forth, etc.”<sup>1</sup> The significance of these words is that Bethlehem was regarded as the cradle of David and his entire stock.

It is, indeed, surprising how many mistakes of this kind have crept into the New Testament on account of the ignorance and confusion of the Gospel writers. In the twenty-third chapter of Matthew, the Evangelist lets Jesus denounce the Pharisees as hypocrites and lip-servants because they paid tithes of mint and anise and cummin, but failed to show mercy. No tithes were paid of vegetables, however, and least of all of plants growing wild. Later in the same chapter Jesus is made to accuse the Pharisees of being responsible for all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, “from the blood of righteous Abel (which could hardly be laid to the Pharisees) unto the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.” In doing so, the

<sup>1</sup> The translation declared correct by Dr. Brandes agrees practically with that of the Authorized Version.

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

Evangelist has confused Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada the priest, who, according to II Chronicles 24: 20 *et seq.*, was stoned by order of King Joash, with Zechariah, the son of Baruch, who was killed by Jewish fanatics within the Temple itself on account of supposed treason during the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans. As this happened in the year 68, the Gospel passage must be a late interpolation.]

### § 18

With the baptism of Jesus by John, the story once more ventures into the treacherous realm of legend and myth. The Spirit of God descends like a dove . . . this spirit that originally was female, a sort of divine mother, as Cybele was the mother of Attis. And a voice from heaven says: "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." More or less emotional value may be ascribed to this legend, but it is impossible to regard it as history.



## JESUS: A MYTH

---

Then Jesus is led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil . . . a creature that appears without being introduced to the reader. He seems to hail from India, where he tempted the Buddha, but his entrance into the story supposes that he is known to the reader, and it is here that the Gospel writer makes a mistake. All that a reader of Luke, for instance, knows about him is what Jesus (10:18) says: "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." And this is not very informative.

There can be no doubt about his being an extraordinarily stupid devil. The man before him is supposed to be the beloved son of the Almighty Lord, and such a person he wants to tempt by fairy-tale lures of the most childish kind. He is so stupid that he does not even know in advance that he is going to meet with a rebuff.

It is also characteristic that this devil does not appear until Jesus has fasted forty days and forty nights, so that afterwards he is very hungry.

The number forty and the words wilderness

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

and fast were inseparably united in ancient Israelitic days. Moses stayed forty days and forty nights on Mount Sinai, and during all that time he neither ate bread nor drank water (Exodus 24:18 and 34:28). Elijah spent forty days and forty nights on Horeb, the mount of God, and fasted all that time (I Kings 19:8).

After that fast of forty days and forty nights, the devil left him and angels came and ministered to him. This he had certainly deserved after such an ordeal. But it is hard to believe that these adventures could have any historic basis.

It may be noted in general that the Gospel writers had no interest in historic facts. They are quite indifferent to any chronological order, and when they mention any historic event, they do so incorrectly as a rule. Thus it is related in Luke 2:2 that the whole Roman world was to be taxed about the time Jesus was born and when Cyrenius (Publius Sulpitius Quirinius) was governor of Syria. But if that be correct, than Jesus came into this

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

world seven years after the date assigned to the birth of Christ, which sounds rather incongruous. In Luke 3 : 1-2, it is said, furthermore, that "the word of God came unto John" when Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene. But this Lysanias had been dead thirty-four years at the time when Jesus is said to have been born.

The fact that their topography is as poor as their chronology, shows that the Evangelists possessed no real knowledge of local conditions. Their geographic ideas are confined to a few names: Galilee, Peraea, Judea, the "sea" of Galilee. When the devil had left Jesus, the latter went into Galilee. While he is walking by "the sea of Galilee," there occurs the calling of his first disciples, two pairs of brothers who are fishermen, but who leave their trade at once to follow him. This incident suggests the one in I Kings 19 : 19, where Elijah calls Elisha, the only difference being that the latter is ploughing with oxen, while the others were fishing. But like those, Elisha at once left his oxen, ran after Elijah,

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

made a sacrifice of one yoke of his oxen, and finally followed and served Elijah.

### § 19

In Matthew those two pairs of brothers are evidently the only disciples. They are four in all, and to them is later added a fifth. In John 1:35-49 the baptism of Jesus by John is followed by the recruiting of another group of disciples under supernatural circumstances. Two of these catch sight of him. He asks them: "What seek ye?" Their reply is another question: "Rabbi, where dwellest thou?" They are shown, and then say: "We have found the Messias." Thereupon Jesus bestows on Simon the name Cephas, which is interpreted Peter, and so on. In John 6:69, Peter declares that Jesus has "the words of eternal life," and that he, Peter, has recognized Jesus as "Christ, the Son of the living God."

In this Gospel, which must be regarded as a very free, poetic transcription, Jesus then re-

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

joins: "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" The last words refer, of course, to Judas as the one that was to betray him.

Little by little the original four disciples have thus become twelve . . . a palpable piece of mythology. In Mark 1:16, there are only two of them, Simon and Andrew, who are fishing with nets. Hence the pun: "I will make you to become fishers of men." For the sake of symmetry, it would seem, another pair of brothers, James and John, also fishermen, are added in John 1:18. Further on in the same Gospel, 2:14, another addition is made in the form of Levi the publican, son of Alphaeus, who in Matthew 9:9 has changed name and is called Matthew like the Gospel writer himself.

Later on in Matthew (12:2), these four fishermen and one publican are, as if by a stroke of magic, turned into twelve apostles. In Mark 3:13 *et seq.*, we see clearly the myth taking shape. Jesus goes up into a mountain and ordains twelve who are to have the power

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

of healing sicknesses and casting out devils.

The need has been felt of surrounding the son of the deity with a considerable court; twelve apostles and seventy disciples. But no one ever became quite sure of the names. In Mark 3:18, Levi is gone, and his place is taken by James, the son of Alphaeus. In Luke 5:27, Levi the Publican reappears. In the next chapter of the same Gospel, his place as the son of Alphaeus is once more taken by James. Among the apostles we find here two named Judas, one of them being the brother of James, and the other one the future betrayer. Thaddeus, on the other hand, has entirely disappeared. The confusion is so great that it becomes impossible to accept these narratives as historic documents. The origin of the number twelve remains obscure. Robertson may be right in believing himself to have discovered a pre-Christian Jesus-worship organized under the form of twelve participants grouped around a thirteenth one, who was called the Anointed (Christ). These twelve have then regarded themselves

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

as "the brothers of Our Lord." Traces of this pre-Christian Jesus-worship may be found in Acts 19: 3, where the Ephesians tell Paul that they have been baptized "with the baptism of John." The doctrines involved had been communicated to them by a visiting Jew, Apollos of Alexandria, who was an eloquent man and fervent in the spirit although "knowing only the baptism of John" (Acts 18: 24).

Under any and all circumstances, it ought to be clear to any thinking man that the story of the twelve apostles as we have it in the Gospels is a myth.

The legend concerned with one of these apostles has caused great mischief. That it ever gained credence does not speak well for man's acumen. For nearly two thousand years this legend of Judas, as an expression for the hatred felt by one group of men toward another, has given rise to untold horrors. There is no exaggeration in saying that this legend, which sets a devil up against the figure of light for the sake of an effective



## JESUS: A MYTH

---

background, has caused hundreds of thousands of human beings to be tortured and murdered.

According to its own premises, this story is impossible. The main premise is, of course, that a man with supernatural qualities, a god or demigod, walks around day after day quite openly in a certain city and its surroundings. He cares so little to hide his movements that a while earlier he had entered that city by full daylight, and it is even said that he had been greeted with enthusiasm by the people, so that he was known to everybody, to every woman and every child. He walks around in the company of his disciples, preaching by day, and sleeping in the open air at night, with those same disciples around him. Nevertheless it is supposed necessary to bribe one of these disciples into betraying him, and for the sake of greater dramatic effect, this is to be done by a kiss! Imagine the police authorities of Berlin in 1888 bribing a Socialist into revealing the

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

whereabouts of Bebel! The police might just as well save their money by using the city directory.

If we had been told that Jesus had sought refuge in a cave or cellar, there might, after all, be some sort of feeble sense attached to the story. But under the circumstances related to us, those looking for him had only to ask: "Which one of you is Jesus?" And he would certainly not have attempted to deny his own name by a lie.

Not only is Judas more superfluous than a fifth wheel on a cart, but he is an absurdity, explicable only as a manifestation of the hatred felt by Gentile Christianity against the Jewish Christians during the second century, when it had become expedient to forget or deny that Jesus himself, Mary, Joseph, all the Apostles, all the Disciples, all the Evangelists, had been Jews.

### § 20

Jesus calms the storm and walks on the wa-

[106]

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

ter. But Moses had already mastered and divided the waters of the sea (Exodus 14:21). Joshua had already mastered the waters of the Jordan, so that the bearers of the Ark could walk across dryshod (Joshua 3:13). Elijah had only to smite the waters with his mantle in order to divide them hither and thither so that he and Elisha could walk across the Jordan as on dry ground (II Kings 2:8).

Jesus ascends to heaven, but already Elijah had been taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire, drawn by horses of fire (II Kings 2:11).

It is impossible to overlook the extent to which miraculous actions ascribed to Elijah and his disciple Elisha in the Old Testament have become ascribed to Jesus in the new one. At Nain Jesus recalls the single son of a widow from the dead (Luke 7:12). But this miracle of Jesus' had already been performed by Elijah (I King 17:17 *et seq.*). A widow in Zarephath lost her son. When he was dead, Elijah carried him up to his own bed, cried unto the Lord, and the child came back to life again. Elisha forestalled the mi-

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

raculous feeding credited to Jesus. With only twenty loaves of barley he fed one hundred men, and "they left thereof." The Gospels have to overbid. Jesus feeds four thousand men on a few little fishes and seven loaves, and there are seven baskets of food left behind (Matthew 15: 34-38; Mark 8: 1-8). In John 6: 5 *et seq.*, this overbidding is carried still farther. There are five thousand men and only two fishes.

In a general way, Elijah is the prototype, the religious hero of the nation. We read in Malachi 4: 5: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." That is the reason why the Evangelist (Mark 11: 9) lets the scribes<sup>1</sup> ask if Elijah ought not to come first. And Jesus replies: "Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things, and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at naught. But I say unto you, That Elias is in-

<sup>1</sup> It is the disciples who, at the scene of the transfiguration, ask Jesus: "Why say the scribes that Elias must come first?" *Transl.*

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

deed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him."

As late as the beginning of our era, Elijah stood in the popular imagination side by side with Moses, and it is not likely that he was placed below Jesus. This is made clear in the seventeenth chapter of Matthew and the ninth of Mark, where Jesus becomes transfigured on the mountain and it is said that his face shone as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. "And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him." Then Peter proposed to Jesus to build three tabernacles, one for each one of them. Then a voice was heard out of the cloud, the other two visions disappeared, and Jesus alone was left behind.

So full of ideas connected with Elijah are the Evangelists, that they let the Roman soldiers on Golgotha understand the cry of "*Eli, Eli*" put into the mouth of Jesus, as a call on Elijah . . . a perfectly impossible misunderstanding, as, of course, Elijah could not be known to them at all (Matthew 27:49).

## § 21

The whole story of the Passion is so saturated with mythology that the sifting out of any historical foundation may be regarded as out of the question.

Thus, for instance, there is evidently some sort of mysticism hidden behind the story of Barabbas as told in Matthew 27:15 *et seq.* The meaning of Barabbas is simply "the son of the father." The original version of the name in the oldest Christian church was even Jesus Barabbas. The evidence seems to be that Jesus and Barabbas are identical. The name Jesus has been dropped from the text because readers were offended by having that name applied to a prisoner who perhaps was a murderer. The likelihood is that an annual sacrifice of the son of a father, of a Barabbas, formed an established feature of Semitic life. In the same manner the scene where the soldiers are mocking the captive Jesus seems to point toward a pagan ritual custom of some kind. Such is the suggestion

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

made by Abbé Loisy, the great French Bible student, who is sceptically inclined, but far from sceptical enough, and who is willing to believe in the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, which is supported by no evidence whatsoever, while he refuses to believe that the mass greeting him jubilantly on that occasion could only a week later have cried: "Let him be crucified!" Philo Judaeus tells about a piece of mummary staged at Alexandria and aimed at King Agrippa, the grandson of Herod, which seems to have represented the survival of a local Jewish custom. A crazy man named Karabas is said to have paraded as a make-believe king, with a tinsel crown, a sceptre, and purple robes. Karabas is plainly a misspelling of Barabbas (see Frazer's "The Golden Bough," Vol. IX, p. 418). Thus the story of a prisoner mocked by Roman soldiers quite out of keeping with Roman discipline, and the equally fantastic story about the Jewish mob's preference for Barabbas, would become harmonized as a reminiscence of a sort of Semitic carnival,



## JESUS: A MYTH

---

which, in its turn, carried reminiscences of very early human sacrifices, of the sacrifice of the firstborn son by his father, which ancient custom was replaced by the sacrifice of the paschal lamb (Exodus 22:29).

### § 22

The anonymous writers of the Gospels, whom we nowadays call the Evangelists, did not succeed in producing a consistent image of Jesus, clean-cut and homogeneous. Too many hands were applied to the task at different times. Consistency is not even seriously attempted. The presentation shows plainly different tendencies running counter to each other.

To one of these writers it was of importance to portray a Jesus who, in opposition to the sketch given us of the Baptist, was not an ascetic. He partakes unconcernedly in banquets. He dines willingly with publicans and sinners. He does not shun women who have sinned, but addresses them considerately and

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

with forbearance. He appears friendly to the joy of living. When the wine gives out at the marriage in Cana, he turns water into wine, and into a wine much better than what they had had before (John 2: 1-10).

To another one of these writers Jesus appeared a gloomy Puritan. While he upholds the Mosaic Law and clearly emphasizes that he has no desire to break it down, he is pictured as strongly opposed to the humane provisions for divorce set forth in the twenty-fourth chapter of Deuteronomy.

In Mark 10: 9, he speaks firmly and definitely against divorce: "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." In the eleventh and twelfth verses of the same chapter, he maintains that a new marriage contracted either by a divorced man or by a divorced woman is equal to *moichaia*, a term for which adultery must be regarded as a very tactful translation.

While, in some of the Gospels, Jesus surprises us by his tolerant views on sexual misconduct . . . as in his attitude toward the

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

Samaritan woman (John 4:7 *et seq.*) ; toward the woman that brought him the ointment (Luke 7:37) ; toward Mary Magdalen, and toward the woman taken in adultery (John 8:3 *et seq.*) . . . he is elsewhere represented as speaking with the extreme harshness of a fanatic monk who looks upon woman as a snare. It is only out of caution that the Evangelist, in Matthew 19:12, has used a certain disingenuousness in putting these words into the mouth of Jesus: "For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake."

It is noticeable that important passages occur in the Gospels where Jesus preaches nothing but the strictest Jewish doctrines. Thus in Mark 12:28-31, when the scribe asks him which is the first commandment of all, he answers: "Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul,

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength : this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these."

In all essentials the Jesus here pictured feels himself in full sympathy with the fundamental traditional doctrines of the Jews.

Elsewhere, on the other hand, he is pictured as moved by the passionately rebellious temperament of a reformer or a revolutionary. Thus in Luke 12:49 *et seq.*: "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? . . . Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division." And he goes on to say that he shall set the members of every family against each other.

This might be explained as the result of a rapidly progressing personal development.

But the narrowmindedness of the Evangelists is betrayed by the character of the provisions against which they make Jesus, the (reactionary) reformer, raise his voice

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

. . . when, for instance, he is described as hostile toward the traditional rules of cleanliness. It is easy to see that the authors of those passages had no idea of the efforts required by the leading men of the earliest time to educate and discipline a filthy tribe of nomadic Bedouins, like the Israelites of those days, into that elementary cleanliness which is the primary condition of a higher civilization. Something like reverence fills the man who reads with understanding the provisions contained in Deuteronomy 23:12 *et seq.*: "Thou shalt have a place also without the camp, whither thou shalt go forth abroad: and thou shalt have a paddle upon thy weapon; and it shall be, when thou wilt ease thyself abroad, thou shalt dig therewith, and shalt turn back and cover that which cometh from thee." In the same manner it is prescribed that the man who has soiled himself at night shall be forced to leave the camp and not return until he has taken a bath.

The numerous provisions concerning cleanliness in the handling and eating of food must

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

also be interpreted as part of this highly needful training of a lot of barbarians into human decency. That such provisions sometimes are dictated by a lack of proper scientific knowledge, has nothing to do with the matter. Every one understands nowadays that the numerous prescriptions for the washing of hands, platters and pots before and after each meal, to which the leaders gave a religious sanction in order to get them observed, were for the good of all, and that any opposition to this exaggerated cleanliness was unreasonable and reactionary.

We read in the seventh chapter of Mark: "Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be,

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well has Esais prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me."

Thereupon follows a wholly irrational denunciation of those so-called Pharisees as hypocritical through and through.

The fundamental idea of the Evangelist, reiterated over and over again, should not be misunderstood. It is simply that everything depends on inner, and not on external, cleanliness. What a man eats does not make him unclean . . . an assertion that remains to be proved. But the unclean words that issue from a man's mouth stamp him as unclean. In other words, the important thing in life is not to be found in external observances, but in the spirit within. This, of course, is an



## JESUS: A MYTH

---

indubitable truth, but not a new one in the Israelitic world, where the foremost of the prophets . . . Amos, Micah, Hosea . . . had been inspired by it centuries before.

One can feel that the Evangelists lived in the belief that the end of the world was imminent. Therefore, they let Jesus cry woe to those that were with child, and to those that gave suck, just as Paul warned men to keep away from their wives at a time when the kingdom of God was at the door.

In Genesis already, work was regarded as a curse that had fallen on man because of his disobedience. Jesus, who, according to the Gospel writers, never worked himself, but lived on the gifts from devoted women (Luke 8: 1-3), and who commanded his disciples to live like beggars, never emphasized the joy or the honor that springs from work well done. Instead he told his followers to consider the birds, or the lilies of the field, which neither sow nor reap, and yet are fed and clothed by their heavenly father.

The Evangelists represent Jesus as indiffer-

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

ent to his family and his country. His relations to his mother and his family are pictured as strained, and a special point is made of presenting him as an example of submission to the Roman domination. He associates with publicans who serve the Roman empire, and who for that reason are shunned by the Jews. He differs explicitly from those who advise against paying tax to Cæsar . . . he even performs a miracle in this connection by letting a fish be caught that carries the required tax in its mouth (Matthew 17: 27).

The morality which the Evangelists make Jesus preach is of no historical interest to-day. Where it seems most original, as in the Sermon on the Mount, with its command that we love our enemies and return good for evil, that morality repeats merely ancient Jewish teachings and one of the favorite themes of Greco-Roman philosophy. Thus, when Diogenes was asked how best to meet an enemy's attack, he replied: "By acting nobly and kindly toward him." Utterances of a similar

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

tendency are found in Xenophon, Plato, Seneca, Epictetus, Cicero. The Cynics in particular took pride in suffering wrong without resentment.

In Leviticus 19: 18, we find the same principle in limited form: "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people."

The calling of the disciples is in Matthew followed by the Sermon on the Mount, of which Mark knows nothing. It is simply a compilation, and the sermon was never delivered as we are told. Even when Matthew and Luke made Jesus say: "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also," there is nothing new in it. For this, the most extreme of all commands, is found in the "*Didache*," which is older than any of the Gospels.<sup>1</sup>

Otherwise there is no opposition whatever between ancient Jewish morality and that of the Sermon on the Mount. This was pointed

<sup>1</sup> For explanation of the "*Didache*", see next chapter. *Transl.*

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

out as early as 1868 by Rodriguez in "*Les origines du sermon de la Montagne*"; later by Robertson in "Christianity and Mythology," and by Schreiber in "*Die Principien des Judentums verglichen mit denen des Christentums*" (1877). Passages with parallels in the Old Testament and the Talmud are numerous. The beatitudes should be compared with Psalms 96:6 and 24:3; Isaiah 66:13 and 57:15; Proverbs 29:23 and 21:21; Ecclesiasticus 3:17, and so on.

The emphasis on intention as opposed to action which, in the Sermon on the Mount, finds its expression in the declaration that "whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, etc.," is nothing but a paraphrase of similar opinions in the Talmud: "Whoever looks at the little finger of a woman has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Bereshith 24 and 24a). It corresponds to a line of reasoning found also in the Roman law, where the mere intention to seduce, to steal, etc., was made a cause for punishment.

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

### § 23

New light was shed not only on the origins of the Sermon on the Mount, but on the reason for fixing the number of the apostles at twelve, when, in 1873, Philotheus Bryennius, Archbishop of Nicomedia, discovered some old manuscripts in a library belonging to the Jerusalem Monastery of the Most Holy Sepulchre in the Greek quarter of Constantinople. Among these was the famous "*Didache*" or "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles." No one has questioned the authenticity of this manuscript. That such a document existed within the early church was known through the writings of Eusebius and Athanasius. But there were good reasons why the church for a long time did not wish the "*Didache*" to come to light. It is plainly a purely Jewish document in its origin. It seems to have been a sort of official proclamation issued by the High Priest to the Jews dispersed all over the Roman Empire. In the first six chapters, which are the most important, no reference is

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

made to Christianity, nor is the name of Jesus mentioned in a single place. The concluding parts of this little document have later become subject to ecclesiastic manipulation.<sup>1</sup>

The decisive thing is that here evidently we have come across the most important source of what later, in the Gospels, has become the Sermon on the Mount, and which also shows a close relationship to the fourth and fifth chapters of Ecclesiasticus. The opening passages will serve as a sample:

“There are two ways, of life and of death, and great is the difference between these two ways. This is the way of life: First of all, thou shalt love the God who created thee, and secondly, thy neighbor as thyself, and

<sup>1</sup> The “*Didache*” consists of two parts, one, didactic in character, known as “The Two Ways,” and another that may be regarded as a sort of directory of church ordinances. The Encyclopedia Britannica says: “When ‘The Two Ways’ is restored to us free of glosses, it has the appearance of being a Jewish manual which has been carried over into the use of the Christian church.” But the writer of the article maintains also that passages from the Sermon on the Mount have been inserted into this earlier document, instead of being derived from it. His reasons for this assertion are, among others, that certain other early Christian documents, reproducing the greater part of “The Two Ways,” do not contain the passages in question.  
*Transl.*

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

whatever thou wilt not that others shall do unto thee, of that thou shalt do nothing unto others. The wisdom thou shalt extract thereof is this: Bless those that curse thee! Thou shalt pray for thine enemies, and fast on behalf of those that persecute thee; for what reward canst thou expect from loving those that love thyself. Are not strangers doing that much? But love those that hate thee, and thou shalt have no enemies. Keep away from the lust of the flesh and the world. Should any one smite thy right cheek, turn thou also the other one to him, and thou shalt be perfect. Should any one force thee to walk a mile, walk thou two with him; should any one take away thy cloak, give thou unto him thy coat as well. Should any one take away what is thine own, do thou not ask it back, for that is not within thy power (probably because the Jews abroad had no rights). To whomsoever asketh of thee, give thou, and ask no return of it; for the Father wishes that to all shall be given of his own free gifts (?). Blessed is he who giveth according to the



## JESUS: A MYTH

---

Commandment, for he shall be without guilt. Woe unto him who receiveth. Whoever be in need, and receiveth, he shall be without guilt, but he who is not in need thereof, he shall make an accounting of why he received, and to what purpose, and when he cometh unto judgment, he shall be heard as to what he did, and he shall not be set free until he hath paid the last farthing. And concerning this matter, it has also been said: Let thy alms burn thy hands until thou knowest unto whom thou shouldst give.”<sup>1</sup>

The Lord's Prayer itself is now generally recognized as no product of the New Testament, but as a compilation formed on Old Testament models.

### § 24

As a rule it may be said that Greco-Roman morality stood far above what the Gospels put into the mouth of Jesus. The fundamental thought of pagan morality, that a good

<sup>1</sup> The insertions within brackets in this paragraph have been made by Dr. Brandes. *Transl.*

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

action is its own reward, never occurred to any one of the Evangelists. The morality of the Gospels is one of rewards. What they make the Jesus whom they picture impress upon his faithful ones, is that they must not perform their good deeds on earth in such a manner that they forfeit their heavenly reward, which is far more valuable than what they can get here (Matthew 6: 1-6; Luke 14: 12-14). This idea of reward is a foregone conclusion to the Evangelists. Any moral prescription must, of course, be accompanied by a promise of reward or punishment. They let Peter ask Jesus what the disciples will get for having forsaken all and followed him. In this question Jesus sees nothing peculiar or blameworthy, but answers that, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, then shall they sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel . . . a reward not very tempting as we see things to-day.

And if the Gospel morality is not on a level with the more highly developed ethical ideas

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

of a later time, neither can the intelligence displayed in these more or less casually reproduced fragments of speech be regarded as of the highest order.

For starting points seem to have been taken Isaiah 6:9, "Hear ye indeed, but understand not," and 28:12, "Yet they would not hear." These words seem to have caused the Evangelists to make Jesus speak in parables. The sources of most of these parables are discoverable. Thus the parable of the sower is an allegory of much older date, by which the gnostic sect of the Naasenes tried to illustrate God's sowing of the seed that springs from *Logos*, by which the world was created.

The parable of the merchant who sold all he had to buy a single pearl is found in Talmud and may be traced back to Proverbs 8:11, where it is said that "wisdom is better than rubies." Some of the parables have been taken directly from the *Mishnah* of the Talmud, which was completed two hundred years

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

before our era, and frequently they have been badly spoiled in reproduction.

There is, for instance, the story of the king who invited his servants to a feast without fixing the hour. Some went home, put on their best clothing, and went back to wait at the palace door. Others said that there was no haste, as the king surely would let them know the hour later. But the king called them suddenly, and those arrayed in their best were well received, while those appearing in their everyday clothes were turned away. The moral is: Prepare thyself to-day, for to-morrow it may be too late.

The parable is mediocre at its best, but still far more illuminating than the corresponding one in the New Testament about the wise and foolish virgins. But what the Evangelists let Jesus make out of it is miserable and irrational. The king invites a number of guests to a wedding banquet (Matthew 22:1-14). Under various pretexts these declare themselves unable to attend. What is worse still,

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

and absolutely unreasonable, they mock the servants of the king and slay them. This angers the king so that he . . . which sounds equally fantastic . . . sends his army to slay the murderers and set fire to their village. Then the king orders his servants to go into the highways and invite whomsoever they may find, both good and bad. The palace is quickly filled, and the king surveys his guests. Among these he finds "a man which had not on a wedding garment," which, under the circumstances, could hardly surprise him, and which certainly could be held no cause for resentment. Nevertheless he says to his servants: "Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

This king is abnormal in his expectation that people who have been dragged in from the street without the least warning shall appear in festive garments, or expose themselves to eternal damnation. He ought to know that the poor, to whom his invitation was particularly directed, have no such garments at all.

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

### § 25

No less quaint, as Bengt Lidforss<sup>1</sup> pointed out, are those parables in which the Jesus of the Gospel writers urge the faithful to keep after God incessantly with prayers. It is always effective, as he gets so tired of this nagging that he is ready to grant anything. In this matter, too, the pagan world entertained more advanced opinions. Lucian poked fun at redundancy and loudness in prayer. He said: "How useful it is, after all, to yell aloud, to remain persistent, and never to take any rebuffs! It is useful not only in pleading a case, but in praying. Consider Timon, who was very poor, but who grew wealthy merely because he howled at the top of his voice and forced Zeus to pay attention to him!"

In Luke 11: 5-9, there is a man who wakes up his friend at midnight and asks him for three loaves, as he has got a visitor at that late hour and has nothing to set before him.

<sup>1</sup> A Swedish biologist and keen literary critic, now dead, who was professor at the University of Lund and a close friend of August Strindberg. *Transl.*

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

At first the friend answers that his door is shut, and that he is in bed with his children. He does not care to get up again for such a small thing. But his annoyer keeps on plaguing him. "I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth . . . Ask, and it shall be given you . . . Knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

A variation of the same burlesque idea occurs in Luke 18: 2-7. "There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with



## JESUS : A MYTH

---

them?" The thing is to pray all the time and not get tired. Then God gets tired at last and answers the prayer.

Numerous examples of no less peculiar parables could be cited. Here is one of unusually bad construction, though the point of it does not in itself conflict with common sense. In the parable of the good shepherd (John 10: 1-6), we are told about the door that leads to the sheepfold, and of him who enters by that door . . . instead of climbing up some other way, as thieves and robbers do. The man who enters by the door is the shepherd, and the shepherd is Jesus. But a while later, when the disciples fail to catch the point, Jesus smashes the whole parable to pieces by saying: "I am the door of the sheep." In verse 9 he reiterates: "I am the door." But in verse 11, the Evangelist has forgotten all about it, and again Jesus says: "I am the good shepherd."

Here is another parable that conflicts openly with sound ideas of honesty and duty. It is the parable of the ten pounds in Luke 19:

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

12-26. That its composition is confused by the mixing up of two mutually unrelated actions, may be left aside. One of the servants who has been given a pound to trade with is so scared by the anger of his austere master that he does not dare to risk that pound in order to make it draw interest. Instead he keeps it in a napkin and returns it as he received it. His master exclaims then wrathfully: "Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?" Whereupon he takes the pound away and gives it to him who had made ten pounds. Finally, being an impetuous gentleman, he causes all who didn't want him to rule over them to be slain before his eyes.

### § 26

This brings to mind other inhuman traits sometimes ascribed to Jesus himself by the Gospel writers . . . his solemn preaching of the eternal torments of the unrighteous, for

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

instance, and the harshness he sometimes shows without palpable reason even against his own mother. It was this mood which later manifested itself in the barbaric intolerance of the church, and which, in ancient times, found its most disgusting expression in the murder of Hypatia, in the year 415.<sup>1</sup> The Evangelists did not feel that such traits rendered the Jesus figure presented by them incongruous or inconsistent. One moment they make the Savior say: "Judge not." At another time

<sup>1</sup> Hypatia, a mathematician and Neo-platonic philosopher of genuine distinction, as well as a woman of rare beauty and charm, was foully and cruelly murdered in her forty-fifth year by a mob of fanatic monks, whose deed undoubtedly was instigated by the Christian Patriarch of Alexandria, himself distinguished for little but his zeal against any one holding opinions different from his own. The murder took place in one of the leading Christian churches of the city, to which Hypatia was dragged by the inflamed mob, and where she was first of all stripped naked. In other words, everything connected with that hideous crime was thoroughly consistent, as it must be held sadistic in its nature and in the last analysis caused by suppression. Her one cause of offence seems to have been that she dared to associate with an intellectual equal, the prefect of the city, who still clung to the old pagan faith. To us of to-day she is mostly known through Charles Kingsley's novel of the same name, itself largely forgotten, but she deserves to be mentioned beside women like Mme. Curie as a brilliant illustration of what the female mind can achieve when given a chance. *Transl.*

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

he shows himself only too prone to pass judgment. One moment he is all gentleness, consideration, full of forbearance and tenderness. And then he becomes more unmerciful than anybody else. This element of self-contradiction grows extremely marked at times. In Luke 22:36, he says to his disciples: "He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one." And they purchase two swords. But when Peter cuts off the right ear of the servant of the High Priest, who is one of those coming to seize Jesus, the latter touches the man's ear and heals it. In Matthew 26:52, he condemns the very use of a sword: "For all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword." And it may be recalled that in the Sermon on the Mount he had said: "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."

In a single place in the New Testament, James 5:11, the example of Job is recommended to the early Christians. This is as it should be, for evidently the figure of Job has been one of those used in building up the

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

conception of a suffering, but ultimately victorious redeemer. The correspondences are not few. It has been alleged, of course, that Job was not an Israelite, but belonged to the Beni Kedem, or Sons of the East, who later became known as Saracens and as such fought in the crusades under Saladin. He belonged to the stock of Edom, and the people of Teman were famous for their wise men, reference to whom occurs frequently in the Bible.

All this makes no difference, however, and it is not apparent in the Book of Job except through the absence of the name of Jahve in the dialogue. It does appear in the framework, which evidently is of a later date. Both Job and Jesus are supposed to be of noble descent. Both are tempted by Satan, and both remain firm in their resistance. Both are exposed to suffering and scorn. Both are threatened with death. Both arrive at last at stations of high honor. Both are of the redeemer type. The resemblances become particularly marked when we read the utterances of Job in chapter 29, verses 12-

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

17: "I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness . . . I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out. And I brake the jaws of the wicked, and I plucked the spoil out of his teeth."

### § 27

In order to hide how completely the Jesus-ideal of the New Testament was rooted in the Old, orthodox Christianity of modern times has striven to establish a sharp contrast between the relationship of ancient Judaism to Jahve as the Lord and the relationship of Jesus to him as a father.

But the Old Testament also regards God as a loving father. Isaiah exclaims (63: 16 and 64: 8): "Doubtless thou art our father . . .

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

But no, O Lord, thou art our father.”<sup>1</sup> More than twenty examples of the same kind may be found.

In the main, the opposition established between the doctrines of Jesus and the earlier ones of the Torah (the written Law) and the Rabbis is wholly artificial. Even the strangest of the things put into the mouth of Jesus by the Evangelists had been said before his time. In Deuteronomy 33:9 we read: “Who said unto his father and his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant.” And in Matthew 19:29 we find this: “And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.”

In the Talmud, under the heading *Baba mesia* (the middle gate) it is said: “Art

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Brandes here adds the words “our redeemer,” but these do not occur in the passage indicated. *Transl.*



## JESUS : A MYTH

---

thou from Pumbeditha (in Babylonia), where they can drive an elephant through the eye of a needle?" But in Matthew 19: 24, these words are laid into the mouth of Jesus: "And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Through the latter part of his utterance, what was originally said in jest gets an Ebionite trend which it did not have before, but which expresses the communistic tendency of the Gospel writer.

As a rule Jesus speaks entirely in the spirit of the Old Testament. "As his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down." (Luke 4:16-20 and Isaiah 61:1-2.)

It is told in the Talmud how a Gentile came to Hillel and said to him: "I will be converted, but only on the condition that thou teach me the whole Law while I stand upon one leg." To which Hillel replied: "That which is hateful to thyself, do not do to thy neighbor. This is the whole law, and the rest is its commentary. Go thou and study it!"

The Gospel writers particularly display their lack of consistency by making Jesus invariably speak as if he were quite familiar with the spirit of the Old Testament, while at the same time they let him refer incorrectly to the various books of the Bible.

Thus Matthew 5:43 puts these words into his mouth: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, etc."

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

If these were really the words of Jesus, he would have shown gross ignorance of the Law. In Leviticus 19:18, where love for one's neighbor is prescribed, hatred toward either natives or strangers is also prohibited, and in 19:34 it is even said that one must love the stranger like oneself.<sup>1</sup> In Exodus 23:4-5, love for one's enemies is expressly commanded:

"If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldst forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him."

Yes, the earliest manuscripts of the Gospels even lack the words later put into the mouth of Jesus: "Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you." But in the Talmud

<sup>1</sup> This is not quite fair. The passage in Leviticus 19:33-34 reads as follows: "And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself." But while it does not go as far as Dr. Brandes seems to suggest, it implies a vast advance on what is preached much nearer at home in these very days. *Transl.*

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

. . . *Sanhedrin* (fol. 48) . . . it is said: "It is better to suffer wrong than to commit wrong." And there . . . *Baba mesi a* (fol. 93) . . . it is also said: "Be thou rather among those that are persecuted than among the persecutors."

### § 28

The picture given us of the contempt felt by Jesus for the Pharisees, and of his constant attacks on them, cannot possibly be historical, but seems the expression of a much later developed anti-semitism, for what he says conforms invariably to their teachings.

When, in Matthew 5: 17, he says that he is not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it, that is a typical Phariseic expression. In the Talmud it is said: "Not a letter of the Law will ever be abolished." We are made to think that the Pharisees found fault with Jesus because his disciples healed a sick man on the sabbath. But the Rabbis were unanimous in holding that the sanctity of the sab-

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

bath could not be respected when a human life was at stake. In the Talmud, under the head of *Yoma* (fol. 85b), it is expressly stated: "The sabbath has been given unto you, and not you unto the sabbath." To heal by making the patient hold out his hand, as Jesus is said to have done (Mark 3:5), was by no means prohibited by the rabbis, and it is plain propaganda when, as in Luke 6:11, we are told that "they were filled with madness" on that account. Such an outburst of wrath on their part is historically impossible.

One is struck, as I have already suggested, by the rigorous manner in which Jesus, in Matthew 5:32, expresses himself against a divorce on the ground of mutual consent. But on this point he was in closest agreement with the Pharisees, against whom he is supposed to be in constant opposition. He merely takes side with the more intolerant view preached by Gamaliel, and against the milder attitude of the Hillel school.

Not even the alleged fact that Jesus had been proclaimed the Messiah would have

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

turned the Pharisees against him. Not only were the children of Israel in general referred to as the children of the Lord, but out of extreme respect would priests and rabbis sometimes speak of a man as the Messiah. One has only to recall the case of Zerubbabel, or the relationship of Rabbi 'Aqiba to Bar-Cochab.<sup>1</sup>

But these examples will suffice. Our feet never touch firm historic ground.

### § 29

The Apocalypse, or the so-called Revelation of St. John, which closes the New Testament, seems to have been written earlier than any of the other books, and in certain respects it may be regarded as the foundation on which the entire structure rests. It is in the nature

<sup>1</sup>Zerubbabel, who was born in Babylonia, became chiefly instrumental in restoring the Temple service after the return from the exile. Bar-Cochab led the Jewish revolt against the Romans in A.D. 132-135 and was recognized by the famous Rabbi 'Aqiba as the Messiah. The name as given here means "the son of a star." As the revolt ended fatally, the Rabbis later maintained that his real name was Bar-Coziba, which means "the son of deceit." *Transl.*

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

of the thing that we cannot tell anything about the identity of that John who appears as the writer of this document. This much alone is certain, that he has nothing to do with the author of the fourth Gospel.

We are told that the writing was done on Patmos, a crescent-shaped little island, hardly ten (English) miles long, and located not far from the ancient city of Ephesus. In those days its splendid harbor gave this island a position of no small importance. It was the terminus for travellers going from Ephesus to Rome or vice-versa. During the Greek period, it flourished greatly and was thickly settled. During the Romans it became a port from which ships sailed daily. Like the other Greek islets in that vicinity, it is nowadays barren, but beautiful nevertheless, free from any kind of depressing effect, and quite attractive with its reddish rocks rising out the blue sea beneath a brilliant sun. A Greek of the classic time might have written an amorous idyl on that island. In the same place an ancient Jew wrote a book meant to



## JESUS : A MYTH

---

strike people with terror by its extravagant prophecies, denunciations, and condemnations, as well as by its grotesque and barbarian imagery. All of it is put in that insufferable style to which the austere manner of speech of the ancient Jewish prophets had gradually declined . . . a sort of Rosicrucian language that was to reappear a thousand years later in the poetry of the Icelandic bards, with its strained circumlocutions.

The prophetic style began to degenerate in the time of Ezekiel. He wrote in exile, between the years 574 and 572 B. C., and it was he who introduced the visionary element for the sake of greater effect. "And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire. Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings.

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the color of burnished brass . . . As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle." Then he goes on endlessly about these grotesque zoological monsters, which may have been inspired by the winged bulls and other fabulous creatures seen by Ezekiel in the temples during his Babylonian exilement.

He is forcible and picturesque, but he does not touch one's heart as did the earlier prophets.

Zechariah, living much later, and writing about 518 B. C., is even more obscure than Ezekiel. Like the latter, he fills his writings with allegories and visions. "Then lifted I up mine eyes, and saw, and behold four horns. And I said unto the angel that talked with me, What be these? And he answered me, These are the horns which have scattered Ju-

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

dah, Israel, and Jerusalem. And the Lord shewed me four smiths.<sup>1</sup> Then said I, What come these to do? And he spake, saying, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head: but these are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it." This is not a lucid, or instructive, or convincing style. It is a style of riddles, of logogriphs, and in addition it is used by Zechariah without skill or grace.

### §30

This kind of style found its classical expression much later, in the so-called Book of Daniel. It was probably written about 165 B. C., and it is not only the direct prototype of the Apocalypse, but the work in which we can see the coming Messianic figure emerge from

<sup>1</sup> The Authorized Version has "carpenters." Dr. Brandes follows the Danish translation, the correctness of which is supported by the Revised Version. *Transl.*

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

the mode of thinking characterizing ancient Judaism.

The Book of Daniel makes you feel that the time is long past when the prophets used to proclaim their visions in the open air. It is designed to be read, and by readers who have the time to brood over it. In style it resembles a rebus. And in that earliest of all philosophies of history which is contained in the concluding part of the work, we meet with all the astounding ingredients used for the composition of the Revelation of St. John. Here we find the horn that speaks, the horn that has eyes. Here we find the essential antithesis of the Hellenic sense for form as expressed through the human body . . . a lack of plastic realization quite offensive to a mind that derives its main pleasure from a piece of art out of the skill used in giving it shape. Instead we meet with mysticism, and all the forms found in nature are merged into the same kind of mystifying chaos that later recurs in the Apocalypse.

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

Daniel saw four great beasts come up from the sea. The first one was like a lion, but had eagle's wings. He beheld it until its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made to stand upon its feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it. Then he beheld a second beast, like to a bear, and having three ribs between its teeth. And some one said to it: "Devour much flesh." After that he beheld a third beast, a leopard, which had four wings on its back and four on its head. Finally he beheld a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, which had great iron feet, and which devoured and broke in pieces the residue and stamped on it with its feet. This beast had ten horns. Then another little horn came up, and three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots to make place for it, and in this horn there were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.

The story goes on and on in this style, arousing the enthusiasm and approval of its own

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

day to such an extent that 235 years later we find the Apocalypse taking hold where Daniel left off.

It has not proved very difficult to discover the time when the Book of Daniel was produced, because the nature of the allegoric allusions make it possible to determine with exactness what events the author had witnessed, and which ones were still unknown to him. He was writing while the Greek dynasty still remained in power, and he was familiar with the events of the half century beginning with the accession of Antiochus the Great. Otherwise he takes no account whatsoever of possibilities or probabilities. His Nebuchadnezzar spends seven years eating grass in the fields, and is then restored to his kingdom which has been waiting for him all that time.

The significant and decisive fact is that, in the Book of Daniel, we notice the beginnings of that disintegration of the strict Jewish monotheism which is continued by Christianity. The name of the Messiah is not directly mentioned. Instead we meet with that strange

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

term, the Son of Man, which is used to designate the founder of the "kingdom of heaven" that was to be established at Jerusalem when Judas Maccabeus and his followers had broken up the empire of the Seleucidae. Then shall begin the final phase of the world's existence, during which justice shall reign supreme. And for that phase we are still waiting, of course.

Ezekiel already spoke (9:2) of a man that was clothed with linen. In Daniel (10:5 *et seq.*) he returns as the principal figure . . . a man clothed in linen whose loins are girded with fine gold. His body is like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in color to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude . . . all of which is transferred, word for word, into Revelation 1:13-14.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Revelation 1:13-15 reads as follows: "And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as the snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his



## JESUS : A MYTH

---

The time of production can be determined with no less certainty for the Apocalypse than for the Book of Daniel. There can be no doubt about its being written between the day on which Nero died, which was June 9, A. D. 68, and August 10, A. D. 70, on which day the Romans destroyed the Temple at Jerusalem . . . a structure which the writer of the Apocalypse still hopes will be spared. But the date can be fixed with even greater precision. The book must have been written before the news of the murder of Galba, which occurred on January 15, A. D. 69, had had time to reach Patmos, as the sixth king, mentioned in Revelation 17: 10 as still in being, can have been none other than Galba.

### § 31

The aim of the book may be given briefly, but first of all must be explained that its background is a belief in the calamities that, according to Jewish theology, were to herald

feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters." *Transl.*

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

the coming of the Messiah. Great upheavals were to take place in heaven and on the earth. The sun and the moon were to be extinguished. War, rebellion, famine and plague were to rack mankind. Satan would be struggling to the utmost of his strength, as he well knew that his time was up.

In the year 66 the Jews had risen in revolt against Rome. But thousands of Jews had already perished in numerous battles and Vespasian was advancing on Jerusalem. Neither Jews nor Jewish Christians could conceive the idea that Jahve would deliver his holy place and his Temple into the hands of the Gentiles. In the meantime it became known that the armies in Gallia and Spain had proclaimed Galba, a tried military leader, as emperor in opposition to Nero. The latter fled from Rome, as we know, and committed suicide with the assistance of a slave when he found himself unable to escape his pursuers.

There were many, however, who did not believe in his death, but surmised that he had escaped to the Parthians and soon would re-

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

turn at the head of a great Parthian army to avenge himself on Rome. This rumor had also reached Ephesus and seemed credible to the Christians, who hated Rome. A reference to it appears undoubtedly not only in Revelation 17: 10, where it is said that five kings (Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero) had fallen, but also in the next verse, which speaks of "the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition." As far as we can make out, this is aimed at Nero, who would return only to perish finally.

The calamities that were to serve mankind as a warning had already been ushered in at that time. The Roman Empire had been harrowed by sanguinary wars, Judea by famine, Italy by the plague, Asia Minor by earthquakes. Of the seven cities to which the Apocalypse formed a sort of circular proclamation . . . namely Ephesus, Thyatira, Sardes, Philadelphia, Laodicea, Smyrna, and Pergamos . . . only the two last mentioned had escaped the earthquakes.

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

According to the prophecy in the Book of Daniel, which served as an authoritative source for the author of the Apocalypse, the oppression of the Jewish people would come to an end after "a time, times, and an half," which originally was interpreted as meaning three years and a half. But being a genuine prophet, Daniel could not possibly be mistaken. Once, in Daniel 9: 24, when speaking of seven weeks,<sup>1</sup> he has years, and not days or weeks, in mind. Therefore, his prophecy was believed to refer to the time when the Apocalypse was being written, as three and one-half decenniums had then passed from the supposed date of the crucifixion.

Consequently, this is what the Apocalypse is meant to convey: The time of respite predicted by Daniel is nearly up. The end of time is drawing near. Dreadful calamities are impending. But the chosen ones will be spared. In spite of Satan's violent onslaught, the church will survive. Rome, on the other

<sup>1</sup>In the passage mentioned, the Book of Daniel speaks of seventy weeks.

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

hand, will disappear from the surface of the earth, and Nero himself will put in effect the sentence passed on the sinful capital of the world.

And, of course, nothing of this is communicated with prosaic directness, but by means of a series of mysterious visions.

The Messiah reveals himself as High Priest, clothed in priestly vestments (Revelation 1:13). In addition he appears: in accordance with Isaiah 53:7, as the lamb that is brought to the slaughter; in accordance with Psalm 2:7, as the newly begotten son of the Lord, who, according to Revelation 12:5, is to rule all nations with a rod of iron; then, in accordance with Daniel 7:13, as the Son of Man walking in the clouds of the sky (cf. Revelation 14:14, where he is given a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand); and finally, as a victorious general, as a Roman conqueror making his triumphant entry. "And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth con-

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

quering, and to conquer" (Revelation 6:2). And again the visionary beholds a white horse, and he that sits upon him is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are as flames of fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written that no man knows but himself. He is clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God (*Logos tu theo*).

The church of God appears as a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars (Revelation 12:1). She is with child, and pained to be delivered, but she brings the Messiah into the world. At the same time, however, the church is pictured as the bride of the Messiah (Revelation 19:7). The marriage of the Lamb is at hand, and his wife has made herself ready. The same idea of the church as the bride recurs in Revelation 21:9 and 22:17. This is an example of the already mentioned Oriental confusion of the god's mother with the bride of the god.

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

Satan appears, in accordance with Genesis 3:1, as a serpent or dragon, with seven heads and ten horns. The Roman Empire, which stands in the service of Satan, is also represented as a beast with seven heads and ten horns.

In Revelation 13:11, Nero as Antichrist becomes a beast rising out of the earth. It has two horns like a lamb, and it speaks as the dragon. And in order that there may be no misunderstanding among the initiated, it is written further on (13:18): "Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred threescore and six." If the words *Neron Kaisar* are written in Hebrew letters, the total sum of the numerical value given to each letter is found to be 666.

This is the triumphant climax of the style of the rebus.

Every one knows now that the expectations and predictions of the Apocalypse were not fulfilled. As prophecy it must then be held



## JESUS: A MYTH

---

worthless, just as its originality is disposed of by its reduction to a Christian paraphrase of the Book of Daniel. Nevertheless the effects of this work have been tremendous. For nearly eighteen hundred years the dreamers and fanatics of Europe have read the history of the whole world out of this fantastic medley. In it they have found condemnatory heavenly judgments on every historic personality, from Nero to Napoleon, that happened to incur their hatred. The Apocalypse has become a nest in which human folly has sought refuge these last two thousand years, thriving splendidly within it and constantly drawing new strength from it.

This is not balanced by the fact that later apocalyptic poets like Dante and Milton may have drawn inspiration from the gigantic visions of those ancient days.

### § 32

The real historic significance of the Apocalypse is, of course, that it reveals to us the state of mind in which the mixture of Jewish

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

tradition and sprouting Christianity assumed tangible shape for the first time. This shape may be defined as part ecstatic mysticism, and part sheer sophistry, balanced by no admixture of reason or knowledge of the world. The result offers no sound nourishment to either reason or emotion, but incites imagination to the point of running away with the bit between its teeth.

This book forms the foundation of the New Testament by striving energetically toward a transformation and completion of the Messianic ideal found in the Old Testament.

If one should have any desire to discover what shape this Messianic ideal assumed within a century, one needs only to turn from the study of the Revelation, which is the starting point, to the Gospel according to St. John, which in reality closes the New Testament and indicates the extent and direction of the road covered.

In its character, that Gospel is no more historic than the Revelation, and it is equally independent of the synoptic Gospels. Details

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

obtained from the other Gospels are treated quite nonchalantly in the fourth as mere material that can be used for the erection of a many-storied theological structure only after having been saturated with symbolism and re-interpreted in a spirit which strips it of all connection with reality.

In spirit as well as in construction, the fourth Gospel is fundamentally as distinguished from the earlier Gospels as from the Acts, which latter work, in spite of all supernatural and miraculous elements, strives consistently toward a purely narrative attitude.

The Gospel according to St. John is throughout nothing but a theological-mystical allegory. The central figure of its presentation is, in himself, nothing but a piece of living allegory. Not a trait is employed that must not be taken in a symbolic sense. And there are passages where one may uncover layer within layer of such symbolism.

Thus, when John the Baptist sees Jesus approaching, he cries: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

This implies first of all an anticipation of the Passion story. Then it serves to connect Jesus with the paschal lamb. In fact, there are several other layers of symbolism within this utterance. In the mouth of John, the paschal lamb serves as a link between the lamb in its literal sense and the idea that Jesus will die in order to take away sin and furnish nourishment for the everlasting life.

But there is still more symbolism in the mere idea of Jesus as the paschal lamb. While the three earlier Evangelists let his death occur on the day of *pesach*, or passover, itself, the fourth one maintains that it occurred the day before . . . that is, on the fourteenth, and not on the fifteenth, day of the month of Nisan. This difference is caused by the passionate controversy regarding the celebration of Easter that broke out in Asia Minor about the middle of the second century. The Jewish Christian party clung to tradition and joined the Jews in celebrating it with a festive meal on Nisan 14. As authorities for their position they cited the Gos-

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

pel according to St. Mark and the express testimony of the Apostle John.

The followers of Paul, on the other hand, felt indifference toward the observance of definite feast days (Colossians 2:16). And why pay any attention to the Jewish Passover, when Christ himself was the true paschal lamb, and brought to the slaughter as such (I Corinthians 5:7)? That is why, in John 19:36, we find Jesus indirectly described as the paschal lamb. In cases of death by crucifixion, it was the custom to break the bones of those executed in order to shorten their torments. According to the fourth Gospel, this was not done in the case of Jesus because he was already dead. The Jews did not want that last act to be carried out because it would have been a violation of the Law of Moses. In Exodus 12:46, we read: "Thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof." And again in Numbers 9:12 it is said: "They shall leave none of it unto the morning, nor break any bone of it."

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

Jesus, then, is the true paschal lamb because his bones were not broken. It is necessary to set back one's mind several thousand years in order to grasp this line of thought, implying the transposition of ancient dietary rules to the nature of maltreatment accorded a divine personality.

It is interesting to note how, in order to escape from these sectarian disputes about the significance of the paschal feast, the fourth Gospel quite overlooks what in the earlier Gospels furnished the cause for the Last Supper, namely the institution of the Communion. Instead the writer of that Gospel makes out of this meal nothing but a final evidence of the love Jesus felt toward his disciples. At the same time his entire presentation of the Passion story is dominated by the Jewish paschal ritual.

### § 33

It is quite clear that the writer of the Gospel according to St. John cannot be the

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

Apostle John mentioned in the Gospels. If it be possible to think of him as still living, he should then have been about 150 years old when he wrote it. The decisive circumstance, however, is that the Jewish Christians of that day gave the Apostle John as their authority for celebrating Easter in accordance with their own views, while the writer of the fourth Gospel considers these views as invalid and irrelevant.

We do not know who the author was. But we know that he had nothing to do with the Apostle. Thus, for instance, he could hardly have been guilty of such lack of taste as to mention himself as the disciple whom the Lord loved, whom He preferred to all the rest. He should undoubtedly have recalled the passage in Matthew 18: 1, where the disciples ask Jesus: "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And in order to humble their pride, Jesus calls a little child to him and answers: "Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."



## JESUS : A MYTH

---

The author of the fourth Gospel starts from a simple premise of no great profundity: God is light, and the world is steeped in darkness. The one possibility of preventing universal ruin rests with the *Logos*, the Word . . . that conception so dear to the Gnostics of the day . . . which is stronger than chaos and capable of overcoming the devil.

Very characteristic of the period when this Gospel was written is the constant reference to the spirit that remains even after the departure of Jesus from life on this earth; the Paraclete, as he was called; the spokesman<sup>1</sup> of man in the presence of God (John 14:16 and 26; 15:26; 16:7). He represents a spiritual principle widely worshipped in Asia Minor about the middle of the second century, and here he is described in a manner tending to render the second coming of the Christ superfluous. The Paraclete takes his place.

There occurs also a single passage (John

<sup>1</sup> Named the Comforter in the Authorized Version and held identical with the Holy Ghost. Paraclete is a Greek word meaning advocate. *Transl.*

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

5:43), where a prophecy is put into the mouth of Jesus that appears to have a definite historical bearing. But the isolated position of this passage detracts from its importance. Jesus says: "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive." It seems possible that this may refer to Bar-Cochab, the leader of the revolt against Hadrian. Such speculations, however, are beside the issue and not very fruitful.

### § 34

What has real importance is that, in the synoptic Gospels, Jesus forbids those whom he heals to call him the Son of God. He would not even accept the title of the Messiah from his own disciples until toward the end, and he would never let them use that appellation in public. Not until the day before his death did he resign himself to that title.

The fourth Gospel shows quite a different state of affairs. It opens with a flourish, and

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

it abounds in devotional praise whenever one of the disciples bears witness. Thus Andrew says: "We have found the Messiah." And Nathanael says: "Thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel." In the earlier Gospels Jesus had taken a deprecatory attitude toward such distinctions. Here he encourages them. They even appear in his own utterances. In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus never speaks of himself as the Messiah. The belief of the disciples in him as such seems to take shape slowly. And it looks as if at last this belief took hold of himself as well.

But in the fourth Gospel a complete theological transposition has taken place. At the baptism already, the original figure of Jesus has become changed, so that instead of being baptized by John, he is now himself the Baptist, of whom the older man says: "He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me." Jesus is the Messiah from the very start. Philip finds Nathanael and says to him: "We have found him, of

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." On seeing Nathanael approaching, Jesus exclaims: "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" And Nathanael says: "Thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel." Whereupon Jesus rejoins: "Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man." In other words, all psychological considerations have been thrown overboard in favor of a theological dogma that appears in all its nakedness from the very first.

This, too, is illuminating. In the synoptic Gospels, pains have been taken to picture Jesus as unreservedly loyal and neutral toward the Roman Empire. Time and again the Messiah asserts: "My kingdom is not of this world." When they try to bring him into conflict with the secular power and ask him if it is lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, he answers loftily and without the least thought of

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

any separation from Rome: "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

According to Matthew 27:37, Mark 15:26, and Luke 23:38, the superscription placed above Jesus on the cross (in letters of Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, according to Luke) to indicate his crime, was: "This is the King of the Jews." According to these, the earlier Gospels, he was unreasonably and unjustly accused of having posed as the King of the Jewish people.

To one's surprise, this idea of stamping the accusation as unjust has been lost sight of in the fourth Gospel. Nor is any mention made of the inscription itself.<sup>1</sup>

### § 35

The fourth Gospel simply refers to Jesus as the son of Joseph from Nazareth. Here, as in Mark, no attention is paid to the virgin

<sup>1</sup> In this Dr. Brandes is mistaken. The incident with the superscription on the cross occurs in John 19:19-22 and is treated much more fully than in the earlier Gospels. *Transl.*

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

birth mentioned by Matthew and Luke. Strangely enough, the author of the Gospel according to Matthew contradicts his own story about the supernatural origin of Jesus by giving us a long and fantastic genealogical table meant to prove the descent of *Joseph* from David.

But, as I have already said, the fourth Gospel does not refer to any miraculous birth. It neither denies nor affirms. The thing does not exist to the last of the Gospel writers. He does not need it. To him the Messiah as man is the son of the daughter of Sion. When he speaks of the mother of Jesus, he is not thinking of Mary, but of the people of Israel.

In order to prove Jahve's sovereign power over the souls of men, it is said in Isaiah (54:13): "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord." This passage is used in the fourth Gospel. In John 6:45-46, Jesus says: "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." Here the Gospel

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

writer wishes to draw a distinction between Jesus and Moses in order to prove that Jesus is infinitely superior to Moses. For Jesus, the word become flesh, *has seen God*. What has been said in the Old Testament about Moses as seeing God, is declared invalid. For it is said here: "Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father."

Yet the statements of Numbers 12: 5-8 are quite explicit: "And the Lord came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth. And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all my house. With him I will speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold."

But at this point the Evangelist severs the Messianic cult from the Jewish stem. The



## JESUS : A MYTH

---

earth-born Moses is here put aside for the heaven-born Son of God, who is God himself: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6: 51).

Thus, whoever believes in Jesus, sees the Father in or through him.

In Matthew 11: 27, the Son is the only one who knows the Father. In the seventeenth chapter of the fourth Gospel, we have got far beyond that point, the Son negotiating with the Father on terms of equality: "Glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. . . . I have glorified thee on the earth. . . . And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was . . . Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee. . . . And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them."

And finally, in John 14:9, he says outright to Philip: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

### § 36

The Son come into this world is then, as we are told by the opening lines of the Gospel, the revelation of the eternal *Logos*. As such he has part and share in the qualities of the deity. To that extent he is God, and one with God. On the other hand, as the Son who has received everything from the Father, he is subordinate to the latter. The Father is greater than he.

Yet, as the only begotten (*monogen*) Son, he is not only the well beloved Son, but he is

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

the only and perfect prototype for that line of divine offspring from which the Sons of God shall emerge.

By being made flesh, the *Word* becomes the *Son*. But the distinction is never fully maintained. When Jesus appears after his resurrection (John 20: 22), he breathes on the disciples as he says to them: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." When he has convinced the doubting Thomas, and the latter simply says: "My Lord and my God," this is met by no protest on the part of Jesus, but he says merely: "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20: 28-29).

What the fourth Gospel wants to bring home under many forms is the natural inability of man to find salvation, and the possibility of gaining eternal life through the deified *Word*.

This is the aim of all its stories and all its preachings. It applies to the healing of the nobleman's son mentioned in John 4: 46 *et seq.* Jesus does not even have to see the dying boy,

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

who is lying sick at Capernaum, while Jesus himself is in Cana. He acts from a distance, saying to the anxious father: "Thy son liveth." The whole story is pure symbolism and meant to bring home the power of faith.

The same is true of the story about the Samaritan woman given in the fourth chapter. Everything in it is symbolically meant. There is, for instance, the contrast between the water of the well and the living water served by Jesus. The point of the story is to show the insignificance of the spot chosen for worship. The only thing that matters is to worship in spirit and in truth. The disciples say: "Master, eat!" Jesus puts them aside with the words: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me." Then follows the simile of the harvest, which again is symbolical. The harvest will be at hand in four months: "He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal." Finally comes the rather easily obtained conversion of the Samaritans, who exclaim: "We know that

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."

The fine passage giving Jesus' mildness toward the woman who had been taken in adultery and was to be stoned in accordance with Deuteronomy 22:22, was originally not a part of the fourth Gospel, but represents a late interpolation. It does not appear in the oldest and most reliable manuscripts, and the awkward manner of its insertion breaks the continuity of the story. And the outcome of the incident, with the escape of the woman, is highly improbable. Her executioners would undoubtedly have regarded themselves as sufficiently free from sin and would not have let their victim go merely because a man without any authority urged them to break the Law by letting mercy take precedence of justice. Thereupon follows, in John 8:12, the outburst by Jesus: "*I am the light of the world.*" When this expression of superhuman self-assertion reappears in John 8:5, it has a far better foundation in his symbolical

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

healing of the man who had been blind from birth.

### § 37

Many of those seeking after some sort of historic foothold among the legends of the synoptic Gospels, have clung to the unlikelihood that these, without foundation in reality, should tell what might tend to place the Savior in a relatively unfavourable light. For this reason much stress has always been laid on the passages which suggest a rather strained relationship between Jesus, his mother, and his brothers . . . passages in which he is represented as unwilling to recognize any natural ties of kinship, while instead designating the disciples as his true family (Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21). Another passage that has received considerable attention from thoughtful readers is the one where, after being received with contumely and ill-will in his native city, Jesus cries: "A prophet is not without honor,

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

save in his own country, and in his own house" (Matthew 13:53-58; Mark 6:1-4; Luke 4:24).

Of such incidents there is not a trace to be found in the fourth Gospel. In his capacity of the Messiah, Jesus is here disentangled from any kind of relationship to a native city or a family of his own. He is now a member of the heavenly family. No one receives consideration apart from the Father, the Word, the Holy Ghost, the Paraclete. His ascension really takes place in the first line of the Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word."

But even what appears unfavorable, and historically probable because told unwillingly, does not bring any certainty. It carries the same impression of dramatic contrast as if some one, in order to emphasize the greatness of Beethoven, should tell a story about his having as a boy played the violin in a country town and been held inferior to the favorite musician of the place. Add to this the unlikelihood of any town named Nazareth having existed at that time.



## JESUS: A MYTH

---

It is hopeless to seek for any historic foundation in the synoptic Gospels. It seems as if the death of Stephen had been the great tragic event that occurred just at the time when Christianity began to make headway as a religion, and it seems possible that the story about the mysterious death of Jesus may have taken shape on the basis of what was told about the odious execution of Stephen.

According to an Ephesian tradition from the beginning of the second century, Mark is said to have been the interpreter of Peter, and to have written the Gospel after the latter's death, with nothing but his memory to go by. If such be the case, it has been revised by some partisan of Paul, Peter being consistently represented as a simpleton, and a poltroon to boot. And it is strange to note that several miracles ascribed to Peter in the Acts, have by Mark, that supposed interpreter and disciple of his, been transferred to Jesus.

At Lydda, Peter heals a man stricken with palsy, who had kept to his bed for eight years (Acts 9: 33-35). Peter says to him: "Arise,

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

and make thy bed." And the man does as he is told. Mark 2:3-12 makes Jesus heal a similarly afflicted man at Capernaum, and by using the very same words.

A good woman named Tabitha dies at Joppa. Peter is sent for, and says to her: "Tabitha, arise." Whereupon she comes back to life (Acts 9:36-42). In Mark 5:21-43, Jesus raises the little daughter of Jairus from the dead by saying to her: "Damsel, arise." These words are in the Bible given in Aramaic: "Talitha, cumi." It is not very far from Talitha to Tabitha, and at any rate the story has been made to serve twice, it appears.

### § 38

If the synoptic Gospels were what they are alleged to be, namely records by eye-witnesses, their historic value would, of course, be very great. As it is, they lack this particular kind of value, but, on the other hand, they have, through long ages, preserved their value as

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

*incile* hortatory writings, and this seems also to have been their original purpose. In addition, their many beautiful stories and parables have for many centuries brought inspiration to poetry, painting, sculpture, and music.

More fascinating than the books themselves, with their impenetrable relationship to actuality, is to an inquisitive layman the pursuit of the Jesus-ideal from its first seeds in the Old Testament to its self-declared apotheosis on the threshold of the rising edifice of a new religion . . . with trumpets blaring; with the white horse, and the red horse, and the black horse thundering past, followed at last by the imaginatively pale horse having death for its rider; with many-headed and multihorned beasts subdued by angels standing on the four corners of the earth and holding the four winds. Additionally fascinating it is to see this ideal in divinely human or humanly divine form . . . said to be the mystic *Logos* . . . rise up as the Lord of Life and Light in that ecstatic poem which, masked as a narra-

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

tive, closes the New Testament with a stirring pean inspired by pity.

Jesus emerged from the fourth Gospel as European humanity's ideal of divine goodness. When Jerusalem was conquered and destroyed in the year 70, and it was proved that the God of the Jews did not protect his own people, but let even his own Temple be despoiled, then the road was cleared for the advent of a new religion. At that time many who were unhappy and oppressed, many who still clung to hope . . . poor people and slaves, as a rule . . . had their minds set toward that Kingdom of Righteousness of which the Apocalypse had given warning.

In order that the new creed should be wholly freed from the old one, it was necessary, however, that human minds in Palestine, in Asia Minor, in all the Mediterranean countries, should be given a decisive impetus. Their innermost souls had to be shocked.

This happened when the news spread that the Holy City had perished utterly.

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

### § 39

For thousands of years, Isis and Horus were worshipped as the mother of the god and the divine child. Nevertheless there is no one nowadays who believes in their actual existence.

The greatest mystery celebrated annually in ancient Egypt was the death and resurrection of Osiris. The idea of god was inextricably connected with the idea of eternal life. To the god, death is merely a transition to new life. Through a description given by Plutarch, we know how the feast of Osiris was celebrated in a little city of the Nile delta. Osiris was missing. He had disappeared into the Nile. When three days had passed, thousands cried in jubilation: "We have found Osiris again!" Mortal despair was changed into ineffable ecstasy, into the rejoicings of a true Easter morn.

Nevertheless there is no one nowadays who mourns the disappearance of Osiris or rejoices at his resurrection. To us the whole thing is

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

nothing but an ancient, and as such venerable, myth.

Osiris was not only the god of the growing grain, but also the god of wine. Papyri found in the pyramids name him the god of the wine-press, the god of the overflowing wine. According to Epiphanius, the renowned Christian bishop of Cyprus and the fanatic enemy of the Origenists, who was born in Palestine of Jewish parents and who died in A. D. 403, Osiris revealed his divine nature by turning water into wine. This happened on the eleventh day of the month of Tobi, according to Egyptian chronology, which corresponds to January 5 in Christian chronology. This is the day when, according to the Christians, the star guided the three Magi to the Christ child. Originally January 6 was held to be the birthday of Jesus. It was not changed to December 25 until the fourth century. In Greece the same day was assigned to the revelation of Dionysus, the god of wine. Pliny tells us that this was the day when the feast of Dionysus was celebrated on

## JESUS : A MYTH

---

the island of Andros, and that among the followers of the god appeared special *Oinotropoi*, or female wine transmuters. Epiphanius speaks also of a birthday celebration at Alexandria on December 25, which he names Cronia in Greek and Kekillia in Egyptian. Elsewhere it is spoken of as the feast of Helios, the sun god. On these occasions an infant child was produced from the sanctum sanctorum with cries of: "A virgin has brought forth! Light is increasing!"

There is here a striking resemblance to Christian doctrines, and the same resemblance pervades the mystic character of the rites.

The fact that Prometheus once was regarded as the great benefactor of mankind, who had given us the great and vital gift of fire, and who had paid with millennial martyrdom for his love of man, cannot make any one nowadays believe that he ever lived and suffered as described. For thousands of years, Apollo, the god of light and purity, was adored in innumerable temples. He had



## JESUS: A MYTH

---

hosts of priests and priestesses, and he guided the destinies of men through his oracles. To this very day his name remains honored. But that he ever existed, no one believes in this, the twentieth, century. On the other hand, the fact that he never existed detracts no more from his significance than from that of Achilles, Ulysses, Hamlet, or Faust.

We know a great deal more about Ophelia and Margareta than we know about Mary and Martha in the New Testament. Yet real existence can no more be ascribed to the former than to the latter.

In his "Address of Gratitude to Lessing," Sören Kierkegaard voiced his passionate agreement with the great German writer's assertion that incidental historic truths can never be used as evidence on behalf of the perennial truths of reason. It was on this basis that, in the book he named "Training in Christianity," he put the question: "Can history tell us anything about Christ?" And

## JESUS: A MYTH

---

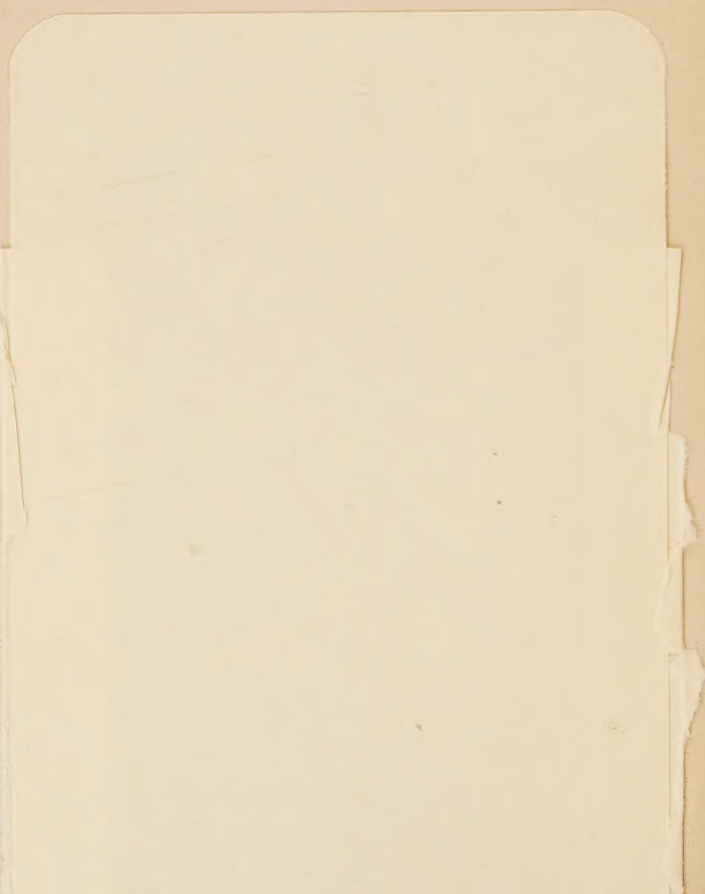
his answer to this question was: "No!"

Translated into the modes of thought and speech used by our own day, this means: divine figures can never be affected by having lived their true and only lives in the minds of men.









**WITHDRAWN**

No longer the property of the  
Boston Public Library.

Sale of this material benefits the Library



